

LEAVE WELL ALONE!

Where oil shapes dynasties and destinies

H. V. Mapp

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By H V Mapp



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"I REMEMBER when it was all green fields round here. Now look at it. Tower blocks and supermarkets! Petrol stations and discos!"

An Englishman's lament would find an echo in Bahrain, except... for green fields read limestone desert and for lament exultation.

I remember when, apart from the desert, there were mud walled houses and palm branch shacks. The flies thrived in the dirt, heat and humidity, and the mosquitoes after rain. Donkeys, white for pedigree, were everywhere, fetching and carrying.

And the people, the Arabs, what were they doing? Hard to tell. A lot went fishing or diving for pearls in season. They sent the women, many wearing grotesque face masks, to the well to fill goatskins with water. Life was precarious. But people were contented (so they would have you believe!). What you saw was traditional. Biblical. That was good, wasn't it?

Then came oil. Not a lot in world terms, but just a drop can work wonders. The two years I spent with the oil company demonstrated the lubricating power. After that it must have been magic for when I came back - true it was forty years later - it was a desert island transformed; not exactly fairyland but blossoming with luxury hotels and plush office blocks, and proper houses and modern shops and villas with swimming pools. The donkeys, ubiquitous for centuries, had become extinct, just like in Ireland. The old narrow-laned bazaars had survived and black robed women still padded about the streets but they now had shoes on their feet. And their daughters or granddaughters were rushing about menacingly, driving powerful motor cars.

Not everyone would know that Bahrain is in the Arab/Persian Gulf, a small island with a lot of satellite islets, or could guess its shape for it rates no more than a dot on an ordinary map of the world. It used to have the population of a small town in England; now equal to a large town.

That said, Bahrain was a prize sought over the centuries by marauders and invaders from all quarters. Persians from the east, Arabs from the Najd province of Arabia to the west, and brigands from the south, the rugged coast of Muscat and Oman, preceded the Portuguese. British interest took shape in the 19th century, when Bahrain became a strategic base on the trade route to India and the Royal Navy vowed to stamp out piracy and slavery in the region.

One of John Bull's other islands, it is today one of Uncle Sam's and, thinly disguised, piracy and slavery have returned. Bahrain was a launch pad for US and British aircraft in the attacks on Baghdad in the Gulf war.

Amid change, one constant factor may be noted, the tribal trait of incomparable and infinite wisdom inherited by the ruler, the Amir, His Highness Shaikh Isa bin Sulman al Khalifah, a gnomish quasi-secular Dalai Lama, venerated by easterners and westerners alike, and head of a family which today, for a reunion, would require to hire a football stadium.

Lacking a railway, the state's well tested form of locomotion has long been the gravy train, fuelled by patronage which was boosted with the advent and application of oil and given a push intermittently by British governments. Many passengers, of different classes, have enjoyed free rides, and while some have been plain sycophants or hypocrites others have been innocents who were simply sucked in. Therefore, when passengers tip their cap to the engine driver, the ruling shaikh, and say in adulatory tones, "I love His Highness," it is not always easy to distinguish the sincere from the bogus.

There could be any number of single-word descriptions of Bahrain. One would be "bland," defined in the dictionary as gentle or suave in manner; mild; not irritating or stimulating.

As a minor player on the world stage, Bahrain is not easily or frequently visible. Perspectives depend on the witnesses' positions. Individually we will focus on different things. Some will take a long view. The short was taken by Alfred the oilman.

He had come to Bahrain for an interview after quitting his job in Saudi Arabia. "Prepare for a culture shock," warned his mates. It was quick to come when he reached the oil town of Awali and made

a beeline for the club. And there - as he explained at breakfast next morning, reeking of whisky - "I couldn't believe my eyes. I was sitting at the bar and on either side of me were guys wearing thobes and drinking beer and whisky. I couldn't believe it...guys wearing thobes!" He meant Arabs.

Alf was distressed. Going on 50 maybe, an English midlander and overweight, he carried the physical and mental scars of long years in the sun, toiling in a refinery in broiling Jeddah on the Red Sea. For a decade, he and brother expatriates had been diligently and clandestinely brewing own brand bathtub gin (while the wives studied winemaking).

The Saudi system worked OK, part of the culture. This Bahrain idea of drinks all round was an infringement. Something rankled, then Alf let on. It was that night in Saudi recently when he went to the commissary to buy some mineral water. On his way home, a policeman halted him. "He wanted to know what I was doing out walking. Everyone is supposed to drive a car. He asked what I had in my bag and I told him Perrier water. He wanted to see. I showed him one of the bottles and he said, 'Open it.'

"I repeated it was only mineral water. He could see that, but he told me to open a bottle. I did so and he sniffed it and said it was OK. So I said to him, 'You've ruined that bottle by opening it. Now you come with me to the commissary and buy me a fresh bottle.' He did, no arguing."

Reviving the humiliating memory, Alf winced. All that Saudi aggro. And here, walk into a bar and there's guys wearing thobes - Arabs! - knocking back the booze with abandon!

Bahrain wasn't really for Alf. Too liberal, unfamiliar, unnerving. I couldn't see him staying: one experience was enough.

His challenge was one I had faced those many years ago, to derive not one experience but many. Returning as a pilgrim, to retrace steps on a sentimental journey, I felt the shock waves from the strange and new and overpowering. For better or worse, it wasn't like the old days.

BAHRAIN was not my original destination, but a clerk's job in West African timber fell through. I remembered Freetown was unbearably hot observed from the deck of a stinking troopship in 1943. The same war had provided some hair raising activities in several Arab countries, so I decided to settle for a peacetime post in the Gulf.

My latest yearning for distant parts - somewhere hot, exotic, even primitive, in a word, different - sprang from infant origins. I was born in London's East End, in Poplar, where foreign sailors, especially Lascars and Chinese, were a common sight, and where my father was a dock labourer who brought the world's trade home with him. We knew the cargo he handled each day from the rum on his breath, the huge splinters lodged in his horny hands, and the tea, sugar and flour hiding in the turn ups of his trousers.

When I left elementary school at 14 to become an office boy it was with a shipping company. Perhaps I was lucky to get a job while economic depression gripped Britain and the world. Sea trade was in a bad way and estuaries and quiet rivers were cluttered with laid up vessels turning to rotting hulks. You could buy a second-hand ship for £1 a ton.

I was taken on by the Stanhope Steamship Company in the basement of Holland House, Bury Street, opposite the back door of the Baltic Exchange, at a weekly wage of 14 shillings. The gov'nor was Jack Billmeir, described in the press as of Dutch Jewish stock, a man due to become a household name, a tycoon, a legend. In his early thirties, he had twice gone broke. If he was third time lucky, it was because General Franco, the Spanish rebel, threw him a lifeline by launching his march on Madrid.

Billmeir owned two creaking coastal colliers, each of a few hundred tons. He was a shipbroker, a middle man, making deals so that ships could change hands, and finding cargoes for ships and vice versa. Stocky, swarthy, yet suave, he was an opportunist.

In my third month as an office boy in 1936, the Spanish civil war erupted. Business took on a new dimension. The Spanish Republican Government needed ships desperately to bring in food and materials and to take out refugees, women and children crammed into open cargo holds. Jack Billmeir was their man, and when the war ended three years later, his two-boat fleet had grown to a dozen oceangoing ships carrying oil or bulk cargoes, many the giants of their day at 10,000 tons deadweight.

Several of the ships, all prefixed Stan, were bombed in republican ports, giving rise to tales of terror and bravery, allegations of gunrunning and human interest stories that brought sensation seeking reporters from Fleet Street, ten minutes by taxi, routinely to the Stanhope offices. I was very impressed and filled scrapbooks with press cuttings.

One of the big ships, ss Stanwell, was badly damaged in an air attack on Bilbao and she limped home to the Tees for extensive repairs, then moved to the Tyne to load coal for Oran in Algeria. I had dropped hints about my yearning to take a holiday afloat and it was arranged for an office colleague and myself to take passage to Oran in the Stanwell and return by public transport.

The trip was uneventful, though our captain got jittery when a Franco gunboat shadowed us down the Spanish coast. When berthed in Oran, I marvelled at its sights and sounds and smells; so hot, so picturesquely Mediterranean. How lucky a 16 year old was I! Master mariners trading to Spain tended to be nervy, fearing for their ships and their lives. It was not only because of the bombing, but because some of the vessels pressed into use by buccaneer operators were long past scrapping date, unsurveyed, unseaworthy and described by their crews as death traps.

Unease showed the night we took a table in a large saloon, four captains, my colleague and me. Whisky flowed and suddenly one man, a diminutive Welshman and skipper of a death trap, took a pistol from his jacket. He declared it was loaded and now he feared no-one! He would use it in Spain if he had to! He waved the gun more stupidly than menacingly, but consternation was immediate in the crowded bar. Frantic pleas for the police were shouted in French and Arabic as drinkers scampered for the street.

The gunman refused to yield the weapon to the other skippers and he was brandishing it above his head as they dragged him to the door. A crowd in the street shouted angrily. A taxi drew up and our party piled in.

The driver halted at a flat fronted building in a darkened side street. A door opened and we filed into a passage, then into an ill lit room with smoke-stained walls and a cheap carpet on the flagstoned floor. It appeared to be some kind of waiting room. All the chairs, backs to the walls, were occupied by men, French settlers rather than Arabs, perhaps 20 in number. They seemed older men, among them a gendarme and a postman, looking vacantly across the room as we entered. Someone made a sign, pointing upwards. We left the room and were escorted up a flight of stairs, along a narrow corridor flanked by doors and into an ante-chamber, sparsely furnished with hard chairs around a dining room table. A woman appeared with a bottle of whisky and glasses, then six scantily clad women came in. Another shock - I was in a brothel!

My companions sat and drank, each with a girl on his knee. The sixth approached me and I rose in terror. She looked at this delicate boy, extended a hand. I recoiled. She tried to grab me and I ran round the table. She laughed. "Ah, piccaninny, piccaninny." The other women repeated it, "Piccaninny, piccaninny, ha, ha!" They had their moment of mirth, then all departed about their business.

Alone in the room, frightened and embarrassed, I could reflect on the times I had gone down to the docks in London, a thousand £1 notes stuffed into my pockets, a ship's wages. It was not uncommon for six or seven men, a quarter of the crew, to have to be discharged with venereal disease, often picked up in Oran.

The unexpected initiation ceremonies in Arab territory were a prelude to seafaring adventures of another order in World War Two, after which I returned to the City. Yet again, war had brought wealth to my employer, Billmeir, his fleet now numbering 20 ships amounting to 180,000 tons. The opulent life style he pursued in the postwar period of austerity and rationing I found offensive. I wrote him a strong letter and resigned.

This procedure I repeated after working a year for a farmer in Suffolk, a leading figure in poultry, whose books I kept without

recording large sums of income about which the Inland Revenue were kept in ignorance.

The City of London beckoned again and I commuted by train five days a week, occupying half a desk in a crowded, dingy two-room office in a basement in Philpott Lane, a stone's throw from London Bridge, a Shipping and Forwarding Agency which handled outward small shipments of foodstuffs and inward mainly oriental carpets sent by British expatriates coming home from India.

Now aged 28, I was a bookkeeper, endlessly copying dates and names and figures from vouchers into ledgers, a trivial, boring routine performed in a dungeon, claustrophobic, tobacco fumed, where phones rang ceaselessly. Lunch hour brought release and relief. The postwar City at street level was chill, the unhealed war wounds, the shells of dockland buildings gutted in the Blitz and the bomb craters cast a blight no whit eased when enveloped by choking fog. Yet London was alive. While it was still a busy port, I spent many a lunch break on London Bridge, observing the bustle of the Thames wharves where ocean liners and coastal colliers lay nose to tail, loading or discharging their precious cargoes.

But my favourite recreation was listening to, sometimes arguing with, the lunchtime orators on Tower Hill. Come rain or shine, the regular batch of soapbox speakers turned up once or twice a week, religious cranks, revolutionaries, the Small Party of Good Boys (the Socialist Party of Great Britain) and the celebrated veteran Christian Socialist Dr Donald Soper, whose words and philosophy we stored for future reference.

Life in the forwarding agency was dispiriting. I didn't like the firm's methods. Sometimes clients would complain about being cheated - when they were charged £80 for the handling of a carpet they bought in Calcutta for £10 - and I felt like writing to them, "Yes, you have been cheated." But I held to silence. The business was only sustained by sharp practice and on that depended the livelihood of my seven colleagues crammed into the dungeon.

On a bleak January day, I decided I had had enough. I must get away, far away, I told myself, so I scanned the overseas vacancies in the press. The Gulf job, the one I settled for, was advertised by the

Bahrain Petroleum Company (Bapco), whose London office gave me a shorthand-typing test and graded me Stenographer.

The company sent me £50 to buy tropical kit and an air ticket which I used on a wet wintry March day to board a dawdling Argonaut whose spacious comfort would disappear with the advent of sardine-can wide bodied jets.

Delayed at halts en route, the flight took nearly a day and a half, arriving after dark in a steamy atmosphere. We were few in number, three new Bapco recruits, the Argonaut's small crew and two other passengers, and allowed through the terminal without formalities. The last to leave was instructed to turn out the lights!

Under a star filled black canopy, a company bus hurried us from Muharraq island airport across the sea causeway to Manama, capital of the parent island, and soon brought into focus the huge stabbing light of the refinery flare and the pervasive smell of oil.

A chap from Personnel met us in the oil camp of Awali, ordered a meal in the club and gave us a token sum of rupees to buy cigarettes. Taking me to my room, or cell, in The Bunkhouse, he explained that the houseboy would wake me in the morning with a cup of tea and that after breakfast in the mess hall I must be at the office block sharp at eight to meet personnel chief Mr Josephson.

Josephson, a large American shaped like a baseball giant going to seed, known also as Jo-Jo, thrust out a hand with attempted affability. "Hi, there! You're the new editor in chief, eh?"

Puzzled, I shook my head. He looked uneasy, shuffled some papers on his desk. "Waal, they said something in London office." I too had a letter from London office. Nothing about an editor. It said I was being hired as a stenographer at £45 a month. Jo-Jo read it. "Waal, you're assigned to Accounts," he said, testily. "I'll pass you over to Mr Smith, the chief accountant."

There had been a mix up. I had applied for a storekeeper's job but London office rated me stenographer. I said casually at the interview, "Do you have a company magazine?"

"Why do you ask? Have you any experience?" asked the interviewer.

I disclaimed experience, deciding it was impolitic to mention that I occasionally turned out an amateurish Labour Party newsletter and

regularly wrote anti-establishment letters to the press. I asked, I explained, because "perhaps I might write something for it."

Nothing more was said, but a seed was sown. Apparently the management had been thinking of hiring a journalist to run *The Bahrain Islander*, then they seized on my chance remark and changed their minds. They decided, without consultation, that I should take over. A bit underhanded, I thought: probably using me as cheap labour. But here was a challenge that I could not really turn down for a year earlier I had approached most of the editors in Fleet Street asking how I might get on a newspaper. Start at the bottom on a local weekly, they said. Now, at the bottom, I could not know that ahead lay a newspaper career that I would not have surrendered for anything. Not in Bahrain, however.

The first 48 hours in my new home were a leisurely introduction to oil. It was called indoctrination, the very word used to mean "brainwashing" to which Anglo-US prisoners of war were then being subjected in North Korea. On a fine warm day, a grand tour by car of company installations was impressive and instructive.

Bahrain, 27 miles long from north to south, and ten miles wide, seemed almost entirely to fall within Bapco's operations. Awali was the hub in the centre of the island from which radiated the various strands of activity: to Sitra on the east coast, where a bewildering jumble of pipes and retorts constituted one of the world's major refineries, adjacent to the tank farm - an estate of huge oil storage tanks - within reach of the man made pier to deep water wharves where tankers loaded their cargoes. To the south lay the oil wells and rigs in the desert where hard bitten Americans drilled for oil and precious water; and on the west coast, Zellaq, the private leisure beach for Bapco's white employees and families. In the north, beyond the ruling shaikh's palace, the capital and port of Manama housed some of the company's administrative affairs.

Bahrain, Awali, Bapco were strange names to me and I was equally ignorant of anything pertaining to petroleum. I was in uncharted waters, where everything was fresh, almost exciting, and approachable without prejudice. Simple, unquestioning soul, I was to learn. In my anxiety to land the job, I sought no details from London office. They gave me a Bapco booklet containing fragments

of information about geography, company history, the weather, being decent to the natives, wearing a sun hat, death benefits and so on. Nothing about working a six-day, 48-hour week minimum (after a 35-hour week in London commerce), or being assigned to non-prescribed duties, or signing away one's life for two years (in quadruplicate) and, according to circumstances, becoming liable to summary dismissal without recourse to appeal and paying your fare home... The small print in the contract, the nitty gritty, was only revealed thousands of miles from home.

The wage was not generous, but it was tax free. Bed and board were free. And Awali was - it was the company's boast - the world's first air conditioned settlement. Did one need more than the company provided, the homes, hospital, social club, school, grocery store, post office, library, laundry, cinema, tennis courts, swimming pools, fire brigade, police force, buses?

Were we not lucky? Consider the men who started it all in this tract of inhospitable desert.

In December 1933, Standard Oil Company of California (Socal), having secured a concession from the ruler and determined that marketable quantities of oil were winnable, despatched a vessel of 3,400 tons, El Segundo, from Los Angeles. Her cargo represented a remarkable logistical feat, everything from needles and thread, hammers and nails, aspirins, tinned food, temporary shelter to tractors, trucks, generators, sheet metal, pipelines, drilling equipment, communication devices and much, much besides to keep 45 men going for nine months.

After two months at sea, the ship anchored off Bahrain, and four months of prodigious effort produced the first oil export, 25,000 barrels of crude, which El Segundo carried to Japan.

Unskilled Arab muscle power had contributed to this success, but it was essentially a self-contained operation. And 17 years later, when I joined an expatriate community of some 2,000, employees and families, it was still self-contained. In splendid isolation, within its barbed wire boundaries, Awali was safe, snug, secure.

It might have been unfair to describe Awali as a ghetto or Apartheid writ small. Yet when working hours were done and the Arab and Asian employees were bussed to their palm foliage

barastis or crude stone homes beyond the main gate, only houseboys, waiters and nightwatchmen remained to serve the needs of American and European residents.

It was in some ways artificial: a community where unemployment was unknown (discounting employees' wives), where chronic illness or mental disorder had no place, where old age or feebleness were never present. It was not designed as a utopia or a Shangrila, for clearly it was not. Everything was geared to the oil industry, directly or as back up services; everything, virtually, was owned or run by the company as a capitalist monopoly forced to provide a form of cradle-to-grave socialism.

It was not a philanthropic exercise, nor a bold experiment in creating a co-operative settlement for the benefit of the workers. Bapco was not Rowntree, Bourneville, Robert Owen or Thomas Bata, the Czech shoemaker, in whose village beside the River Thames I was later to work. Profits, not idealism, guided American enterprise, it was generally supposed.

What was an American company town? In 'Labour and Democracy in the USA,' published in 1939, Kenneth White wrote: "A company sets up in the country, builds a camp or village, owns every building and service, including sanitation and police, keeps the estate private and unincorporated so that there can be nothing corresponding to municipal government or a franchise in local affairs for those who come to live and work there, owns the store at which everyone must trade with monopoly prices, employs the only doctor and hairdresser, operates the only cinema and school."

That was virtually a photograph of Awali. White added: "Loss of civil liberty is often felt so keenly that those who take employment in the village come to regard themselves, and be regarded, as lost and degraded souls. Where the employer cares to exert his power to the full, an atmosphere of almost inconceivable terror and despair pervades communities for whole decades."

A decade later that view was reinforced from another angle. An American journal, World Oil, apropos an agreement reached by Creole Oil Company and the Venezuelan Government to build "a suburb" for oil workers, reported: "It is Creole's theory that, conditions being equal, workers would rather live in towns or cities

than in the artificial confines of an oil camp. Aside from the fact that oil camps generally contribute little in a direct way to the overall welfare of a region where they are situated, life in a company camp tends to stifle the individual initiative of the worker and to foment a paternalistic, even socialistic, philosophy. Creole holds that such conditions are not conducive to the development of interest in what are normally civic concerns, and keep the thinking of dwellers in such conditions indifferent to community welfare." The suggestions by these authors that workers could feel degraded, terrorised and stifled would have been hotly refuted by the Bapco management, whose members would probably have declared, "We too live in this environment and have come to no harm."

Given a situation where every domestic service and amenity appeared to be free - and these included fresh water, gas, electricity and sewerage - and given that nothing was in seriously short supply (apart from family housing), the company was quite capable of fulfilling the role of civic authority. An elected civic council would have been an idea foreign to company management. But there was a cogent reason why such an idea could not be entertained. It might have sown a seed outside the camp and aroused a clamour for democracy in Arab Bahrain.

William Mawdsley, MA (Oxon), had a word for it: prison. The nearest to an intellectual on Bapco's payroll, he had a word for senior management: Philistines! Before he left - he supervised primary education - Mawdsley penned a string of verses lampooning the philistines. Later, when he turned up in Manama to work on his own account, he was asked "Why did you not return to Bapco?" His reply in the Arabic 'Voice of Bahrain' was: "When you have regained freedom, you do not voluntarily return to prison!"

Bapco was not a penal institution. The regime was not deliberately repressive. The barbed wire and guards on the gates could be ignored. It seemed that freedom was lacking only when it was sought. The old timers who had matured with the organisation found nothing incongruous about it. Men who admitted, boasted, that in a whole two-year contract or longer they had not, other than to go to work, set foot outside the company compound, not

travelling to Manama to shop, to Zellaq to swim or to villages to satisfy a curiosity, these men were in voluntary exile.

The Anglo-American oil men in their enclave were a race apart, a hierarchical society which, while not intending to be oppressive, was reminiscent of the military. A paternal when not contemptuous attitude towards eastern labour, the management's fawning over the government and ruling family, the absence of means to sound out public opinion - such as these, added up, indicated that we were all prisoners of a system.

Not many, I suspected, were concerned about these matters. Earning a livelihood came before all else. But I was disturbed. Things seemed to go wrong from the start. My appointment was ill planned. Then, during indoctrination, after agreeing to have my picture taken for record purposes, I was confronted with an ink pad.

"Thumb first," said a security man. "Ink it, then press in this square." I protested. I wasn't a criminal. Why should I give my fingerprints?

"Everybody has to," said the official. "Why?" I demanded.

"Company policy," he replied.

Subsequent attempts to get an explanation for "company policy" from management proved fruitless. Rumour had it that if anyone was blown to bits in a refinery explosion, fingerprints would furnish identification. An attempt to fingerprint wives was abandoned when they rebelled.

Being quick to entertain doubts, I perceived there was much to inquire into and I was prone to express opinions. Early on, a pleasant young Scotswoman, guardian of a thousand secrets in the CIA-like personnel records chamber, confided to me: "Be careful what you say. It all goes in your file."

Had I been a real journalist with a nose for news and freedom to publish, I might have had a field day. The Islander was the sole local publication and these were stirring, history making times. When I left London, front pages were dominated by the decision of the parliament in Teheran to nationalise Anglo-Iranian Oil, a British company, 53 per cent owned by the Westminster Government. King Ibn Saud in Saudi Arabia had just won a 50-50 share of profits from the Arabian American Oil Co (Aramco).

Talks on a new agreement between Anglo-Iranian and the Persian Government broke down and the country's massive oil industry and the world's largest refinery at Abadan came to a standstill. Iran consequently lost its primary source of income.

A new chapter of history started at this point, both for Iran and the whole Gulf area. What effect an early resolution of the Iranian crisis might have had is a matter for conjecture. Subsequent events were highlighted by the revolution that toppled the Shah, the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the bloody Gulf War involving the United States, the UK and others. Links for all these are discernible.

The upshot of Persia's problems in 1951 was feverish activity across the Gulf, where Arab rulers pressed for more money from the British and American oil firms, while these in turn set about boosting oil production to compensate for the shutdown in Iran. The stampede for more oil, notably in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, was to put untold wealth into the hands of shaikhs and princes who created, alongside massive welfare programmes, social structures that at times proved an affront to humanity.

Such matters belonged to the future when I was handed over by Josephson to Leslie Smith, chief accountant, to whom I would be answerable. Smith introduced his deputy, Ebenezer McGregor, and Canadian Ray Duncan, head of the audit section to which I was assigned.

I learned that *The Bahrain Islander*, which would not occupy all my time, had been launched in 1946, successor to a scurrilous sheet which employees had printed in Manama and which, when the wives started coming out, had to be closed down, along with the company brothel. The personnel department handled the official publication, made a hash of it and passed it over to the accounts department. A duplicated fortnightly of ten or a dozen pages foolscap, it required half a dozen highly paid men, on a rota, to put it together, write editorials and then scout round for typists to cut stencils. What with trying to keep contributors to deadlines, it was all too much hassle. Accounts wanted to be relieved of the *Islander* and found a legitimate excuse: that the department had, unfairly, to bear the production costs in its own budget.

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A new chapter of history started at this point, both for Iran and the whole Gulf area. What effect an early resolution of the Iranian crisis might have had is a matter for conjecture. Subsequent events were highlighted by the revolution that toppled the Shah, the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the bloody Gulf War involving the United States, the UK and others. Links for all these are discernible.

The upshot of Persia's problems in 1951 was feverish activity across the Gulf, where Arab rulers pressed for more money from the British and American oil firms, while these in turn set about boosting oil production to compensate for the shutdown in Iran. The stampede for more oil, notably in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, was to put untold wealth into the hands of shaikhs and princes who created, alongside massive welfare programmes, social structures that at times proved an affront to humanity.

Such matters belonged to the future when I was handed over by Josephson to Leslie Smith, chief accountant, to whom I would be answerable. Smith introduced his deputy, Ebenezer McGregor, and Canadian Ray Duncan, head of the audit section to which I was assigned.

I learned that The Bahrain Islander, which would not occupy all my time, had been launched in 1946, successor to a scurrilous sheet which employees had printed in Manama and which, when the wives started coming out, had to be closed down, along with the company brothel. The personnel department handled the official publication, made a hash of it and passed it over to the accounts department. A duplicated fortnightly of ten or a dozen pages foolscap, it required half a dozen highly paid men, on a rota, to put it together, write editorials and then scout round for typists to cut stencils. What with trying to keep contributors to deadlines, it was all too much hassle. Accounts wanted to be relieved of the Islander and found a legitimate excuse: that the department had, unfairly, to bear the production costs in its own budget.

Members of top management considered the question earnestly and decided that if I could hang on for 12 months, the *Islander* and I would become part of the personnel department.

It never occurred to me that I was handling a valuable piece of property or slice of corporate life, as important, say, as the laundry, the commissary and the swimming pool. The management's attitude to the *Islander* was not encouraging, yet it had no other direct channel of communication with employees and families than notices stuck on boards at strategic points (often unread) or directives issued with the monthly bank statements. It was a useful vehicle for company propaganda.

Our printing operations had been ritualised by the training division: 1,200 copies of up to 10 duplicated sheets, collated and stapled by hand, all done by the Arab-Indian print shop, called Ditto Room. Distribution was one copy to each white employee and a few each to New York and London office and government and commercial circles in Manama.

Taking "to inform, educate and entertain" as criteria for a paper, the *Islander* served its purpose. Under those headings could be listed births, deaths and marriages, career promotions and long service awards, cinema programmes, coming events at the club, church notices, sports reports, Training Topics, Fire & Safety Hints, new records set for processing oil or making steel drums, the weather, occasional poems, articles for sale and wanted, the crossword. If these items, which were for the most part contributed, were the sum total of the *Islander*, the job would have been simple. I had the tools of the trade: a well used typewriter, a heap of copy paper, a pen and a box of Roneo stencils. Knocking other writers' copy into shape was no great task. The trouble came with the stuff I wrote.

Where millions had been invested in plant and equipment, one would expect circumspection in handling, so individual procedures were laid down for Bapco's countless operations. A single sheet of instructions explained how to tighten a nut and a 50-page document on using the typewriter. But nobody had got round to systematising hard and fast rules for the *Islander*. Words can be funny things to handle. Woven into facts is one thing, but spun into ideas...that way lies danger!

"Published fortnightly by and for the employees" boasted our masthead slogan, but it was a misnomer. I envied my opposite numbers in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, professionally coached, working in public relations departments with modern printing equipment, publishing not only company facts and staff events but news and comment from the United States and Britain. Above all, pathetic though they usually were, Letters to the Editor!

I was sure they had virtually a free hand. I had to submit almost all written copy, no matter how innocuous, to a chain of department and section heads right up to the general manager, all exercising their right to comment, amend, add or excise.

Scant allowance was made for my shortcomings. Unfortunately, it did not work the other way. In my first feature, I included the words "militate against." Smith crossed out militate and substituted mitigate. I told Smith that he was wrong and I would fetch the dictionary to prove it. He snapped back, "That won't be necessary." He knew better than any dictionary.

THE company's work schedule had scriptural authority: six days shalt thou labour and on the seventh rest. Our day off was the Muslim sabbath, Friday, Yom al jum'a. But Sunday, a normal working day, was a holy day too, when manifestations of joy were permitted covertly but not publicly. Denied organised games and sports and the open-air cinema, Awali wore a solemn air.

All was not lost, however, for those with religious leanings, for two alternative services were made available. Both had caused me to play truant in military times for I resented the dragooning of my conscience. Their link was a litany of unctuous phrases: in one place, the cantor or caller, having secured a reverential hush intoned: "Kelly's eye...Two little ducks...Blind forty... and Doctor's Chum", inviting any in the congregation to leap into the air with a scream of "House!"

At the other event, the caller or priest, not always strictly sober, would insist that Almighty God was on our side, suggesting an inconsistency when our enemies were advancing on all fronts.

I thought Tombola, Housey, Lotto, Bingo, whatever its name, an abomination. To see grown men crowded on mess decks, afloat or ashore, a whole ship's company silenced by this weekly ritual, like slaves - it was a sorry sight. I no more liked being lined up for naval church parades, by order.

And now, my first Sunday in Awali - if I was not to sit and mope in my bunkhouse cell - I had a choice: Housey Housey at the club or evening service in The Udenominational Church. Daring not to say, "Lesser of two evils," I went to church.

An American missionary conducted a simple protestant service and afterwards we all repaired to the home of Mr and Mrs Bell for tea and home made scones and made small talk. A couple of hours passed pleasantly enough.

The house of worship that Bapco built was an icon free chapel, a neat structure of timber and stone which could seat a hundred with extra chairs squeezed in. The two wings of Christendom shared it: Roman Catholics at 6.15 am and 5.45 pm on Sunday, with a mass sometimes on a Thursday morning; and non-Catholics at 8.30 on Sunday evening, plus Friday communion when a suitable cleric could be found. A third sect which there assembled weekly for what they advertised as "business and initiation" was St Andrew's Lodge of Freemasons.

Preachers were many and varied, but a single organist, John Browne, the office machines mechanic, played at RC and protestant services, weddings, nuptial masses and special occasions. The Catholics seemed to be better organised, with two priests, Irish and Italian, providing continuity, while "undenominational" Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians and Methodists knew no regular chaplain. The more devout of the generally small Awali congregation, strengthened on occasion by a contingent from Manama, yearned for the day when Our Own Man would arrive. The protestant faithful were dependent on, and indebted to, the several pastors from the American Mission in Manama. It might have seemed fitting that they should minister to an American firm, though Americans seldom came to church, the top brass only on most hallowed occasions. (Inevitably, the church committee's chairman, Walt Oswald, head of Bapco R & D, was American.) The missionaries took services every other Sunday. Filling the gaps was easy while the Persian crisis lasted because British warships and other forces stationed nearby provided a regular source of military padres. Then clergy from other oil states dropped in once in a while.

We had, too, our home grown evangelists. The Church militant in the shape of a gritty young Yorkshireman stood beside me one Sunday, eager for battle as he bellowed his way through Onward Christian Soldiers. He had the fire in his belly and then, transferred to the pulpit, showed the fire in his eyes. Fire (and brimstone) he could guarantee unless we, his hearers, mended our ways. It was heavy stuff, from a lay bible thumper of the old school. He was a humble refinery operator (no rank was humbler) yet he could stand

at the lectern, stare into the eyes of his superiors in the pews and tell them they were Damned, Damned! Bravo!

He was invited to return. Not so a novice hot gospeller, a young tousle haired American whose first performance was his last as he read at great speed in a flat monotone a tract devoted to Fiery Evangelism. Pyromania as a cult doubtless had origins in the refinery's belching flare.

We felt some of the fire during the long hot summer, when the fans in church were no match for temperatures around 100F. The faithful dwindled to single figures and we took refuge in an air conditioned schoolroom. One of the missionaries, a most obliging and popular character, took his last service before returning to the States and only later did I learn he had contracted TB. The mission people continued to serve us. Sometimes they came to Awali, at other times we went to their place in Manama. They were very good with refreshments.

But all was not well. The unsettled pattern of worship and antics - as when a new Mission pastor turned scripture into theatre by giving prophets distinctive voices in his reading - did not amuse Mrs Garlick, the secretary, and members of Awali's church committee. At last the good news came: the Reverend R G Rickells, with his wife, was on his way from New Zealand to become Bahrain's first Anglican chaplain. Our Own Man!

The new arrival was something of a disappointment. He spoke nervously. He looked "over the hill" to me, as though he should have gone straight home to England and retirement instead of stopping off at Bahrain for a stipend, like working his passage home. The Awali committee were not happy either when they discovered he had, without so much as by your leave, visited the RAF station at Muharraq and secured a part time post as padre.

He made an uncertain start with his first service. It was Remembrance Sunday and the church was packed, scouts and brownies making an unusual appearance. Mr Rickells said how proud he was to be serving in Bahrain, part of the British Empire (which it was not).

The following Sunday, the church was so full that people had to stand. The upper crust came, including the Belgraves. A party from

the Mission arrived during hymn singing and made much fuss about finding seats. One minister, who used to take our services, behaved in a most undignified fashion and, unfamiliar with the form of service, sat and stood in the wrong places.

Rickells was at this time not really attached, not yet inducted. And up popped Archdeacon Roberts from somewhere in the region to say he would oppose installation. He argued that an Anglican could not be made minister of a non-denominational church, as Awali's was, and Mr Rickells would have to wait a year or so until St Christopher's, Bahrain's first Anglican church, was built in Manama.

Consternation among the committee in Awali: for this they were not prepared. An appeal was rushed to the Rt Rev W H Stewart, Bishop in Jerusalem. He admitted there was a problem. The church building was Bapco property and could be used by any organisation or religious body at the company's discretion, on territory outside Church of England jurisdiction, strictly speaking. However, on balance, he found against the archdeacon. Bringing the Rev Rickells into the fold was pursued with decent haste. The bishop came to instal him, a giant of a man of advancing years, resplendent in robes and regalia, dwelling briefly in magnificent voice on "schisms within the Church." The new vicar knelt before his superior with the obligatory and obsequious gestures, nervously made his vows, and emerged the man in charge.

Even so, at his next service he was upstaged. It was the last appearance of our fiery evangelist who, lost for words when presented with a lavishly bound Bible by children from the Sunday School, accepted the minister's offer "to say a few words" and launched into a well rehearsed diatribe, his final warning of the perils of perdition. He wouldn't be back for a second contract, he said. Sighs of relief all round.

Mr Rickells next coped with Christmas services. Memorial services for King George were poorly attended and uninspiring. But gradually he found his form. Rigid C of E routine crept in. A number of women took to wearing a hat. The missionaries, who initially seemed to regard him as an interloper, accepted him and his sombre vestments. They toned down their gaudy neckties.

Missionaries are not above suspicion, and after good works they may have much to answer for. Why had they come to Bahrain? To civilise the Arab and convert the Muslim or the heathen? Their name awoke doubts: The American Mission of the Dutch Reformed Church, the church which in South Africa sanctified Apartheid through the scriptures.

I had picked up an oil magazine with a harrowing tale about the mission in Manama, told by an American nurse who described how a destitute Arab woman, left by her husband with a crippled daughter and a blind son, begged admission to the mission. For some inexplicable reason, the nurse was vexed by this plea, but she relented and allowed the family to enter, the woman was handed over for training "to our janitress, a darky," and thus was begun the mission orphanage.

The mission people had been around the Gulf for a long time, before the turn of the century, when life was raw and primitive. They set up in the south, at Muscat, before coming to Bahrain.

In 1896, Samuel Zwemer, an American who had recently married an English nurse, Amy Wilkes, brought a small band of missionaries from Basra to Manama and used a room in his house for informal worship until, thanks to subscriptions of some 2,000 dollars from US and English sources, a chapel was built in 1906.

Zwemer also opened a little Christian bookshop in the bazaar and, concerned at the pathetic lack of local medical care, he persuaded the Reformed Church in America to send out a doctor. The bookshop was now the surgery and proved inadequate for the purpose. The ruler, Shaikh Isa, was asked for a plot of land for a hospital, but he refused. Then, legend has it, a palace servant, an African slave, dreamt that Allah commanded the shaikh to make land available. Isa, informed of the revelation, responded: "If Allah wills, so be it." He duly gave the site for a hospital. Some seven decades later, the administration of his great-grandson, also Isa, required a strip of the hospital's land for road widening and paid the missionaries 180,000 dinars for it.

The Ottoman Turks were in power when the American missionaries arrived in Kuwait and Mesopotamia. The pioneers, those who survived, were still about in the 1950s, wizened old men,

legging it up the Gulf, bent on good works. Many were of Dutch stock and if one asked for an Arabic primer in a bookshop the likely response would be the umpteenth reprint of a 1917 work by Van Ess of the American Mission in Basra. About that year, two Jackson sisters came to Basra to observe Van Ess's ministrations. One stayed there and the other, Ruth, came to Bahrain. Both became principals of their mission schools.

The missionaries established the first schools and hospitals, modest affairs, as well as chapels for worship. If they intended to convert the natives to Christianity they were unsuccessful. I asked Ruth Jackson how proselytising worked and she replied, "With difficulty. First, you must make your convert a centre of attraction, but after that it is difficult to make him fit in with the crowd."

Over tea at the mission, the Rev Haller said, "Bahrain is one of the most tolerant places in the Gulf. Only a handful of local people have converted. The Arabs like our hospitals and amenities, but they tell us frankly that they don't want our religion. Most of the Arab Christians you see here are people who were persecuted in Northern Iraq and on the Turkish border." He added, "Muscat is probably the most enlightened place, with second and third generation Christians. The church council there is of many races, white, Arab and Indians, and they discuss social and other problems together."

The missionaries exercised tolerance, up to a point. They came by invitation to a carol concert in the Bapco clubhouse led by the Awali mixed choir. A lot of oil families turned up and it was quite a boozy do, as between carols the waiters darted from table to table dispensing trays of lager and shorts. The mission folk took it in good part, though they abhorred alcohol. They had taboos. They would not marry divorcees in church, yet perform the ceremony in a house. An American divorcee who came from Saudi Arabia to get married in a friend's home in Awali was told by the officiating missionary, "No alcohol for 24 hours before the wedding. If I so much as smell a drop, the ceremony is off!"

The trouble with the mission people was that they were bigoted. That word was used by my tennis partner, Pinhey, who knew them when he was first secretary at the British Political Residency before Bapco lured him with a sinecure.

They were bigoted because they denied themselves the chance to go to Saudi Arabia in defiance of Ibn Saud's ban on non-Islamic religious practices. Protestant, Catholic and other ministers visited in the guise of teachers or clerks and peddled their faith on the sly. But the missionaries regarded that as dishonest. If they could not go openly as ministers, they would not go at all.

At one service, the Rev Harvey Staal, offering prayers for "the lost" (non-Christians) referred to "the darkness of Islam." I asked Pinhey what he thought of that. He shrugged. "The man's bigoted," he said.

After more than half a century in Bahrain, the mission folk must have had a wonderful story to tell. How could I discover it? The head man, Dr Storm, invited me to interview him. When I arrived at the appointed time, his wife tendered apologies. "My husband has had to go to bed with a fever. He was doing an operation only this afternoon."

Mrs Storm, PhD, sixtyish, wore a yellow flowered dress that reached the ground, an old fashioned touch considered obligatory until recent years. It was not chic, though protection maybe against mosquitoes. She reminded me of other women on the island who amounted to something, yet were rarely seen on public occasions: Mrs Belgrave, the adviser's wife and "directress" of female education, and Lady Hay, the Resident's wife. Of one generation, tall, straight backed women, all dressed with utmost modesty, in contrast to Salwa, Lebanese wife of Ahmed al Umran, director of education, a fine looking woman in her forties with western style. There were painfully few women one could name or recognise, certainly not Arab women. And that disturbed Mrs Storm. We talked for nearly two hours but I could not steer her towards my mission: Mission history. She was keen to talk about politics and women, and about men. But she carefully avoided Bahrain in her observations.

Persia came up. She said, "When I read our American statesmen, after one trip through Persia, writing about democracy in that land, I put their books down and refuse to go on reading. They just don't understand." I think we both understood. If you want to hide the truth about a country, call it a democracy.

Mrs Storm and her husband had experienced an eventful career in missions in China and various parts of the Persian Gulf. Her views on Arab ways were forthright. She spoke of the Sultan of Oman, whose failing sight her husband had restored. The sultan was a man of culture, well educated and widely travelled. He had wealth and his huge palace was filled with art treasures. "That man has everything," she said, "everything except a heart."

She went on to explain that an Arab could not refuse a direct request, so she stunned the sultan by asking to see "the women." Embarrassed, he ordered that his guest be taken below. The beauty and splendid rooms with electric fans behind her, she entered a small cell ventilated by narrow slits in the walls, high up. Inside were herded the sultan's two wives, several concubines and a number of women slaves. The memory moved Mrs Storm. She continued, "It makes my blood boil when I talk to authors or read their books on Arab ways - and all but two in recent years have been men - when they say that Arab women are contented. What woman, whatever her race or colour, wants to share her husband with another woman? What do these male writers know about the women? They only put their questions to Arab men. They have never spoken to the women. How can they know whether the women are happy?"

The hour was getting late and I prepared to leave. I asked Mrs Storm if I could return at some time to see her husband. Curiously, she said, "I'm afraid that will not be possible. But we have some books and notes on our work. I'll send them to you."

I made sure she had my address. Nothing ever reached me.

Conversion was not all one way. A Bapco employee, Bob Dickinson, a popular figure in Accounts and a leading player in Awali rep, arrived a Presbyterian but decided to embrace Islam. This pleased the ruler, Shaikh Sulman, who gave him a fine robe, a gold dagger and the title Shaikh Rashid. Then one hot summer day he got married in Awali's Christian church to a Catholic. There was much speculation as to his religious standing and how the ruler would take it, but we never heard of any conclusions reached.

There were at this time issues of greater urgency. The natives were restless, even after the British Government, in time honoured

fashion, had sent in a gunboat. With oil production at a standstill in Iran, there was scope for trouble both there and in Bahrain, home to a large Persian born or related population.

Anglo-Iranian declared the nationalisation of the company unlawful. It was Britain's biggest overseas investment and the British Government, as major shareholder and tax gatherer, keenly felt the loss of revenue. The United States Government, aware that American oil companies were benefiting from this crisis by boosting their production in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, nevertheless expressed alarm at a perceived threat of Persian communism.

The two western powers were heavily engaged in the Korean war and reservists and mothballed ships were recalled to active service. Some were routed to the Gulf on their way home from Korea. Stopovers were made at Kuwait and off the Iranian coast to show the flag, but Bahrain was their base.

In my reporter role, I was invited aboard the cruisers Gambia and Euryalus to meet the officers, a novel experience for one who despised naval officers as a class. Time had not erased bitter memories of the inhumanity and stupidity of unyielding adherence to discipline for its own sake and the rigidity of rank. The sinking of the P & O liner Ettrick came readily to mind.

After the greatest armada in history had discharged the Allied army on North African beaches in November 1942, those of us who had manned landing craft or beach signal stations returned to our troopships for the journey home.

Our Combined Ops squad found the Ettrick's mess decks left in utter squalor by the thousands of disembarked GIs. The idea that we should have to live for a week in these stinking holds struck me as absurd, when there were lines of empty cabins on the upper decks where Army officers had been quartered.

A preposterous notion seized me. I made a formal request to see the senior naval officer, to whom I made a humble petition for permission to occupy the vacant cabins. He was aghast. The very idea! Quite out of the question. Our place, as lower deck ratings, was below on the rat infested mess decks.

The ship docked in Gibraltar to replenish fuel and fresh water. We drew a month's pay and I immediately spent half of mine on a treat for my family, a carton of Hershey bars left behind by the Yanks' canteen. We sailed at dusk, joining a convoy heading for the Atlantic.

Tragically, the German torpedo that struck the Ettrick amidships found the deck where many of my shipmates were sleeping. The thud of the torpedo against the hull, the shudder of the explosion and the sickening smell of cordite brought instant terrifying awakening. The ship's engines died, the bulkhead lights, a faint blue, went off. Momentarily, I lay stunned in my hammock. Then all of us, fifteen in my section, tumbled out. In darkness, we could hear the swirl of water. There was no time to search for uniforms. In the panic I forgot to grab my lifebelt.

Barefoot, clad only in underwear, we scrambled up the stairways to our lifeboat. It was a black night, in the small hours, but not too black for the U-boat pack to pick out and pick off ships in our convoy. Seven or eight out of 20 vessels were sunk. We witnessed the flashes of explosions as ships steaming away from our paralysed hulk were trapped a few miles distant. One almighty explosion spelled the swift end of an auxiliary carrier laden with aviation spirit and a complement of hundreds, of whom few survived.

Watching the mounting toll of destruction, our ill dressed band shivering with cold and fear had to wait for the boat to be lowered. A sub-lieutenant was to join us...after donning his Number 1's and packing a large suitcase in his upper deck cabin.

Marvellous, he and I did the same work, coding and decoding wireless messages, using identical books and methods. But he was a cipher officer and I an ordinary coder. (I spotted him in the City of London just after war. He was behind a shop counter selling light bulbs and switches.)

We lost 28 seamen from our detachment in the Ettrick. They perished needlessly, through snobbery, I wrote in a bitter letter which brought no response from the Member of Parliament I sent it to. Had my challenging plea for cabins been heeded, my comrades would not have perished. The tragedy did nothing to sustain the perpetual claim of propagandists that war's glory is the way we all

pull together, shedding privileges of class and status for the common good when (such irony) "we are all in the same boat."

Peace time was a few days old, after the Japanese surrender in 1945, as we lay alongside a Singapore jetty in the Kedah, a Malay Straits coaster pressed into RN service. We, communication ratings, lived aboard but worked ashore in Union Building in two watches. Taking travel, mess duties and personal chores into account, few hours remained for sleeping.

For me, sleep would not come. Every night there was a party in the wardroom, with seven or eight officers entertaining a bevy of Chinese girls. Music and dancing, screaming and shrieking and firecrackers produced a commotion that echoed and reverberated through the empty ship. How others slept through it I never fathomed, but I could not and it was very wearing.

One night, around midnight, I decided I had had enough. I went to the wardroom and banged on the door, then explained to the drunken first lieutenant my predicament and requested him to abate the noise. The captain, an RNVR lieutenant, aged 24 and product of a farm in Gloucester, poked his head out and bawled, "Go and fry your f..... face! You won't tell me how to run my ship!"

The party continued, somewhat quieter, for another hour, when the ladies staggered ashore. I had not tried to sleep for it was nearly time to go on watch. I was reading a newspaper when a duty seaman came below to tell me, "You're in the rattle. Bring your cap and go and fetch the master at arms from his cabin."

How absurd! I was on a charge, condemned, and I had to summon my executioner! This petty officer was distressed at being disturbed at an unearthly hour. As he dressed and vacated his cabin, he said he ought to smash my effin' face in!

We crossed the darkened well deck to the quartermaster's office at the head of the quayside gangway to await the arrival of a sub-lieutenant, barely out of his teens and struggling to grow a ginger beard on his first time foreign. He was to sit in judgement on me, or rather sway for the drink was still in him.

A single electric bulb cast a weak pool of light by the gangway, scene of the trial. Clad in tattered gym shorts, large boots and cap, I was called to attention.

The petty officer put the charge, something about "Making Complaint...Incorrect Procedure."

Witnessed by the watchman, the subby prosecuted. "Insulting the captain...Insubordination," he began. He was sensible enough before establishing my guilt to exonerate the captain, an officer never inconsiderate to men under his command. Did I not realise that I could not bring matters direct to the captain, that there was a proper procedure?

Warming to his task, the youth (he was little more) extended his harangue to "tantamount to mutiny." He leered, "Do you know what tantamount means?" If he meant to humiliate me, he almost succeeded. My mates started brushing past, pausing to observe this curious nocturnal scene before filing down the gangway to the truck waiting to take us on watch. "Come on, Lofty," they shouted up. "We'll be late!"

The petty officer whispered something to the subby, then instructed me, "Right turn! Dismiss!"

I descended to the truck. I was shaken but inwardly fuming. I was the victim not the wrongdoer. I hadn't staged the wild party that started all this. The trial was a farce. What right had they to accuse me? I supposed I had wounded their self-esteem, a mere rating questioning the way they, the officers, ran their ship. So they would teach me a lesson. Hence the charge.

Perhaps that was the end of it for them. Not to me, though; I was determined to take the matter higher, to the C in C even. When we returned from the city a messenger was waiting on the gangway with an order: "Pack your bags immediately. You are all being drafted ashore."

Now, after a five-year lapse, I was going aboard again. To meet the officers. On level terms. A marine major deputed to give me a tour of one cruiser said, light heartedly, "Now I'll take you down below to see how the poor live!" He need not have bothered. Nothing had changed.

The long summer of 1951 was terrible. No-one could remember such heat, and a number of people died from it. Arab families left their houses in Manama at night to sleep on beaches or in the desert. Indian clerks came into their offices in Awali on rest days,

not to work but to sit in the cool of the air conditioning. In ships tied up alongside or offshore, conditions were especially severe. The chaplain of the cruiser Mauritius rushed to Awali hospital on one occasion to plead for help. A dozen sailors were prostrate with heat exhaustion and one was not expected to live. Rumour had it that mutiny was threatened in one ship.

Crews could find little relief beyond swimming over the side. Some parties came to Bapco and were given a refinery tour - out of the frying pan into the fire, almost literally - and taken for a drink in the Awali club where a modest sum was allocated for their refreshment. Officers were entertained lavishly by the British community in Manama. Americans in Awali cared for their own.

As summer eased and shade temperatures dipped below a hundred, the humidity increased distressingly. But the effort to stir into leisure had to be made and naval teams came to play the oilmen at football, cricket, hockey and water polo. A Royal Marines light orchestra won appreciation from a large Awali audience.

The Euryalus, 5,600 tons, with a complement of 550, including marines, had an uncomfortable month in the Gulf. Younger officers thought their careers at this stage rather a lark. Over gin and tonic and a poor lunch of tinned pork and peas, they enthused over recent duck shooting parties farther east, dances and cocktail parties.

Of the social whirl, Lt Cdr Clark took a jaundiced view from his tiny cabin taken up with a bunk, two metal filing cabinets, a hard chair and a miniature electric fan of perfunctory purpose. Cabins hot as ovens under a merciless sun were no place to sleep. All the officers made a beeline for the quarter deck at night, he said, racing with cushions to secure the best berths, knowing that at 4 am boy ratings would arrive to hose down the decks.

Clark had refined speech and an agreeable manner, but I wasn't sure whether he was having me on. He had instructions to keep me amused until the captain returned from some urgent errand ashore. Would I like to see his stamps? He got out some sheets and blocks, a few hundred stamps, a part of his 125,000 collection, he said. ("My accountant buys every new issue world wide for me.")

His story was that he was a stockbroker, not a sailor. He disliked the Navy and detested the long round of cocktail parties. After

commissioned service in banana-boat aircraft carriers in the war, he stayed on for two years to train recruits, spent a period at the Admiralty and when at last he was demobbed he had only six months in Civvy Street before he was recalled and posted to the Med. He had no proper job to do at sea so he played with his stamps and hoped that in a year or so he might be able to return to his wife and the Stock Exchange. A sad tale, but was it genuine?

What a pity the poor chap couldn't enter into the spirit of things, like his fellow officers. Naval officers were accorded proper tribute, as when four US destroyers from Korea called in for bunkers and orders. Two went to Arabia, two came to Bahrain. Our Manama Correspondent, Mary Hay, reported to the Bahrain Islander: "Manama was very quiet with the exception of three days when the USS Kennedy and USS Fiske visited. There were two cocktail parties and several dinner parties given in their honour and both the hosts and their guests seemed to enjoy themselves immensely and some of the swimming pools became very popular towards the end of the evening. I am sure everybody enjoyed meeting such a very nice crowd of visitors to the Island."

These same officers were royally received at a dinner given by Bapco's American management in the executive guest-house, the 30-odd commodious vehicles that brought them, mostly gleaming new autos from Detroit, drawn up like a motor exhibition. Fairly or not, the scene produced comments such as, "If they were British ships, a meal on the club terrace would have been good enough." Miss Hay observed that "The captain and officers of HMS Dalrymple gave a most enjoyable cocktail party on the eve of their departure to England and everyone was very sorry to say goodbye to the popular officers."

The excitement created by the appearance of naval vessels, their officers and men, had no parallel for the merchant service, the tankers and cargo ships that came and went with scant notice and no mention. For them, no Seamen's Rest, not even a canteen at the company's wharf at Sitra. I discovered that a ship belonging to my first employer, the Stanfirth, was berthed at Sitra for ten days, loading a record cargo of drummed products. The crew, cooped up after a long trip from Australia and India, were invited to play

football in Awali against a Bapco side and a company bus called for them. After the match, the bus took them straight back to their ship. The captain, his first mate and the chief engineer came with me to the bunkhouse for a glass of Scotch and I invited them to have dinner at the club. The skipper politely but firmly refused: if his crew could not stay a while in Awali, then he certainly would not. I was embarrassed.

Discomfort aboard had an echo ashore. The housing shortage, crisis, scandal, that perpetual blot on civilisation, appeared in Bahrain to be insoluble. In Awali, housing or the lack of it governed friendships, attitudes to the job and management and the choices open to married men, forced to live as bachelors, who could no longer bear the strain of separation from their families. Some found solace in drink, gambling or an occasional visit to the brothels in Manama, but others just quit and returned home.

There was not enough housing to go round. The system devised to allocate it was rather less designed for justice and fairness than for satisfying the labour market. A test of standing in the firm was to tell the management, "Either you bring my family out or I quit." The short answers to this ultimatum were: "OK, you quit," or "Tell your wife to start packing, we have a house waiting for her."

Awali had mushroomed from nothing, from tents and nissen huts to laid out estates of bungalows. At the end of 1945 there were 136 family homes and four years later 400. Additions came in fits and starts, dependent, the company claimed, on availability of building materials in a world reconstructing itself after the war.

Although, according to Belgrave, the shaikh's adviser and the final arbiter on taste and fashion, Awali was depressing, meaning the sameness of the rows of Swedish bungalows and the identical company furniture within, family homes were comfortable and functional, equipped with all mod cons. Bapco subsidised its employee tenants, while elsewhere tenants were victims of rackrenters. The shaikh owned most of the land and appeared to dole it out for building purposes on some whim or other. Land was acquired by "doing His Highness a favour," and the small parcels when built on were extremely valuable. As demand for housing

rose, in line with economic activity stimulated by oil, landlords became greedy and the ruler had to impose rent control.

Inside its defensive fences and guarded gates, Awali had a feature which if not unique was certainly distinctive: the bunkhouse. Not quite the one old filmgoers would recognise, the barn where ranch hands hung up their six-shooters and bedded down on the hay, it was spartan enough. It was the place that everyone, the most monastic or masochistic excepted, urgently desired to escape from.

The bunkhouses, there were several, had been erected during the war. They were meant to be temporary, but a decade later they were not merely used but overused, filled till they creaked. They were long, low timber buildings, with 24 bedrooms, 12 on either side of a corridor; divided in the middle by two ablution blocks, each with two showers and a lavatory. There were no cooking facilities and the Persian houseboy brought a cup of tepid tea to the bedside in the morning and had another ready after the day's work, for which service and room cleaning he collected five rupees a month (37½p) from each lodger to supplement a meagre wage.

The rooms were not large, some nine or ten feet square, with a simple wardrobe, tiny table and kitchen chair and a bed whose mattress was as hard as the iron frame. Cheap coir matting covered part of the floor. Obviously they were not designed for comfort. One or two rooms boasted an armchair, but these were stolen from the lounge at the club.

The bunkhouse was bachelor accommodation, though many occupants were married men. Some employees never had to put up with them: a new hospital doctor, manager or senior engineer might bring his family with him, or if unmarried go straight into a self contained flat with bedroom, lounge, kitchen and bathroom. Women employees shared houses. But for the majority, the bunkhouse was the starting point. Thereafter, one question was ever in mind: when do I get out?

As a landlord, the company had an allocation policy, simple and unchallengeable. As with municipal housing in Britain, a points system operated. One point a month added up to 24 points at the end of the first contract, generally supposed to be the required number for a house. But skill outweighed points, of course. An

employee who could not easily be recruited or replaced could demand, and get, a family house in a matter of months.

Such a man was Doug Ransome. We came out on the same plane. ICI trained, he was a good catch for Bapco and, as foreman of the instrument shop, a key man. We had a good friendship. He was an easy going, pipe smoking Teessider around my age, thirtyish. Many a night we sat out on the club terrace long after the drink was finished, gossiping about things, particularly politics and religion, anything to stretch our minds. On days off we trekked to villages like Rafaa or climbed the jebel.

Doug's tenure of the bunkhouse lasted a month. He was a good man, so he was moved into superior single accommodation. His pay was raised when he took over the job of an American, but the firm saved money. He started giving lectures on his work at evening classes, something new. Four months after he joined, his wife and young daughter arrived. I was happy for Doug. But it spelled the end of our philosophising into the small hours and I missed it.

Awali, Arabic for high place, was built in part on a craggy hill that looked out across a rockstrewn basin to the distant refinery and the jebel. Atop the hill were the camp's first and best permanent dwellings, stone houses called gutch, solid and squat as mausoleums, yet spacious and gracious internally. Nature, liberal applications of precious water and the attention of native gardeners combined in the course of a decade and a half to raise a protective wall of greenery around the houses, the family homes of senior management. Creeper covered the walls and tall, manicured hedges enclosed beds of bright flowers. Paved lanes between houses lay in the shade of tall trees. At a time which felt like spring, when flowers bloomed and little birds twittered, sheer tranquillity reigned. It might have been leafy Surrey of the stockbrokers.

From this serene peak, the way down passed the club and dining hall and the executive guest house, the slope ending at crossroads. The road to the right, eastward, brought together the main office block, the commissary, post office, garages and workshops before striking out to the refinery and Sitra, the tanker terminal.

Straight ahead at the crossroads, north to Manama, the road revealed on the left hand the open air cinema, the cricket arena, a

swimming pool, the primary school, church and main housing estate. On the other side of the road, hard football pitches, the hospital and the colony of bunkhouses completed a compact camp.

The contrast between high and low points was profound. The bunkhouse setting was dusty desert, parched saplings and huge pyramids of stored oil drums. Men returning from work marched in file, like prisoners returning from the exercise yard to their cells, while at the crest of the hill the groceryman and the gardeners who served the hierarchy and their wives made up most of the traffic.

Here was encapsulated the American Dream, the path to fulfilment. Not to put too fine a point on it, here virtually was log cabin to White House. A solitary room in the bunkhouse to the general manager's fine house on the hill was the slow but mandatory route for anybody determined to succeed.

And that was not the summit. The real seats of power were in New York, where a boardroomful of directors and vice-presidents of Caltex planned grand strategy for their burgeoning empire. Bahrain was a centre, if not the centre, of field operations. Not the most profitable, but the most adaptable. As it pushed up refinery output to meet insatiable demands, it also trained men from Europe, Australia, South Africa and other places who would set up and operate refineries in their own countries.

More and more men were sent to Bahrain and Awali became more and more crowded. Housing and restaurant arrangements were frequently overstretched and although revolt was staved off, the management had to take notice.

The last thing senior managers wanted to do was to take employees into their confidence. Some plans for development were revealed, but more withheld, so rumour was rife. One could imagine that a company aiming to maximise its profits would see its ideal workforce as a collection of bachelors, docile, happy in their work and determined to make a career. Practice had to be otherwise, bringing in wives and children who needed to be housed and fed, wives provided with maternity services, children schooled in Awali or in overseas boarding schools.

In the longer term, politics had to be considered. Nationalisation of the oil industry could not be ruled out one day, promotion of local

employees could reduce expatriate jobs, so a time might come when fewer not more houses would be required. But for the present, the bunkhouse boys just wanted to move out.

To be fair, there were some who had come to terms with the bunkhouse, at least they never complained. But they were a special breed of men, transient roughnecks: the hard working, hard drinking, hard swearing guys, gangs who drilled for oil or did construction work. The builders were usually Americans with International Bechtel, beefier specimens than the Brits who once came out with Motherwell Bridge.

The muscular Americans worked like Trojans, though their motto of "16 hours work, four hours liquor and four hours sleep" was an exaggeration. Their heroics became part of legend, of course, and it was common knowledge that a couple of years back a hundred or two of them were packed into bunkhouses, two to a room. They used to light fires on the stone floor and cook cans of beans. And they used to pick up young prostitutes in Manama and smuggle them by truck into Awali, and the girls used to stand under the showers for ages, savouring the extreme novelty of running water!

I suffered their habits just for a short while after my arrival. It was like living in a madhouse. They would roll back from town in the small hours and congregate in a room facing mine, drinking, whooping and playing a gramophone.

I had been in Awali three months. Temperatures were soaring and the air cooling system seemed to make little impression. I slept badly, especially after a strenuous evening's tennis on Tuesdays. Then I would lie awake all night and rise feeling wretched ; yet, an hour after a solid breakfast, the mood for work would come back.

One day Dennis Wells sought me out. "I've got a house for four. How'd you like to share it, doubling up?" "That depends," I replied.

Why had he picked on me? I supposed because we had met at parties. He was not the sort of chap I took to immediately. He exaggerated a good deal, perhaps due to his job in the drawing office where, no doubt, he drew on a small scale while visualising on a large one. "Who else have you got?" I said.

"Eric Partington and Colin Bowling."

Eric I knew. He was EJP, as he signed his regular contributions of verse to the Islander, topical pieces of local interest, parodies of Shakespeare. Hesitating, Dennis said he would share with Eric.

What about Colin? "He's all right," said Dennis. "Quiet, easy going."

I wanted to meet Colin before committing myself to sharing a room. Both ex-Navy, we accepted one another on sight.

How Dennis wangled the house, I never discovered, for we were all relatively new boys, Colin having done six months. But it didn't matter. We were out of the bunkhouse!

Our bungalow was large and detached, vacated by a manager on leave and ours for three months. It stood in a small garden with a privet hedge and had three spacious square bedrooms, one used to store furniture. The lounge, some 45ft by 12ft, was graced not excessively by a walnut suite of sideboard, table and eight upholstered chairs, plus two small tables, a settee and three matching easy chairs and two big lamp stands. The cream washed walls were decorated with fancy electric lamps. Everything was large: the cupboard-lined kitchen and scullery that ran the length of the house, the fridge, the cooker, the kitchen sink, and the bathroom with shower and sunken bath. There were even odd items such as an electric iron and ironing board.

The bungalow had a front porch and a wide roofed verandah at the back. Every room had several large windows, all fitted with roller blinds, and air conditioning that gave off genuinely cool air. The phone was taken away soon after we arrived, but the houseboy was left to keep the place tidy and bring early morning tea. The luxury of it all seemed unreal, and so it was. Eric, EJP, who joined Bapco a week before me, had quickly set about establishing the reputation of a playboy. He had a sharp mind and must have realised as soon as he stepped over the threshold the scope for a casino. And thus our temporary home became.

Night life in Awali meant either parties or gambling. You could tell a good party some hundreds of yards away by the noise of 30 voices, sometimes more or fewer, trying to sing together, never mind the harmony. Come two or three in the morning, when the drink in the fridge and buckets of ice were still in demand and

bodies were heaving in what passed for dancing, one could appreciate the sterling qualities of these Swedish bungalows, floors in particular, while failing to appreciate the effect our revelry had on the neighbours. But none complained.

Gambling was exhilaration of another kind, depending on the state of fortunes. Sessions lasted through the night or until funds were exhausted. Americans played for high stakes and it was not unknown for an auto, say a Buick Sedan, to change hands on the turn of a card. Now - never mind the rest of us - Eric had a place of his own!

Apparently, Dennis and EJP had quarrelled at a card school just before the move but had patched it up. We were of one generation, Eric looking the oldest. Three of us were stenographers, Dennis odd man out. What had brought us to Bahrain? My companions held women responsible. One claimed he had got a girl into trouble, one said he had just left his wife and the third said he had recently divorced. I was inclined to disbelieve them. I could have claimed, but not blamed, a broken romance, but that was history and irrelevant to my present circumstances.

Colin, from Leeds, had a gentle voice and a keen sense of humour. We usually chin wagged, over cups of tea, for the last hour before lights out. The others I scarcely saw because I was out every evening, at the cinema, playing tennis, dropping into the office to type my correspondence or drinking at the club.

Of Dennis, there was not a lot one could say. He could keep his end up at card schools and parties. He obviously liked to be liked, but he had to work at it. EJP was another matter. The aura he developed came not without effort, yet it seemed natural. He might have been around 35, short and prematurely losing his hair. He exuded bonhomie and could chuckle at the feeblest jest. He appeared the complete extrovert and if anyone had called him a rake, he would not have demurred.

Not really a ladies' man, I would have thought, and when he and Patricia Ryan met in Accounts I questioned whether this was a meeting of minds. They teamed up, however, reminding me of a theory my mother propounded, "There's a Jack for every Jill." Pat was younger than Eric, rather pale, less athletically spirited than the

other Irish in Awali. It was a convenient relationship, for Eric needed a woman in tow and Pat was helpmate and hostess.

The first night in the new house, he visited friends for a gambling session. He returned about 3.30 and charging around the unfamiliar bedroom woke Dennis, who lost two hours sleep.

On the third night, Eric made his debut as host. Tables and lamps were arranged for casino atmosphere and a handful of visitors came, among them a shrill woman whose voice penetrated the other rooms and kept us from sleep. The next session, a few evenings later, went on until two o'clock. The following night was a grand party. Most of the guests came from the club after the bar closed and they were in a merry state. In bed, I could hear the metallic ring of a spinning roulette wheel punctuating the noisy chatter and excited screeching of women.

It was reasonable to assume that drink was flowing, hence the bathroom was much in demand. A door from the lounge opened to a passageway between the bathroom and Dennis's bedroom. Unable to sleep for the hubbub and toilet traffic, an enraged Dennis stumbled into our bedroom. He wanted a piece of wire or strong cord. Colin gave him a length of flex and asked what it was for. "I'm going to fix the door so they can't get to the bathroom," said Dennis, savagely. He lashed the handle so that the lounge door could not be opened. The gamblers and followers were trapped. For well over an hour, we lay in our beds listening to men and women hammering on the outer door. Dennis's bed was only a few feet away but he refused to relent. About two o'clock I dozed, despite the din.

Dennis and Eric had words the next morning but the parties went on. Two or three nights a week cars, taxis or the Bapco bus halted at our door. The bell would ring and in troop a dozen men and women, but they departed at a reasonable hour.

One afternoon, Eric and Pat arrived by taxi with trays of exotic fare, meat and fish delicacies, fruits and sweet things, two or three cases of lager and some bottles of harder stuff. "Having a few friends in tonight," Eric announced airily.

I got in around 11 that night. Mein Host was in good form, topping up glasses. The hostess handed round titbits to a clutch of men and women flopped in our easy chairs. Pungent cigar smoke swirled

around the air conditioning ducts. All very civilised: must have cost Eric a month's salary.

He offered no introductions or a drink. I went to my room, where Colin was reading in bed. I turned in but not to sleep till after two, when chatter and music subsided and the banging of car doors sounded the retreat. Dennis, not included in the revellers, was furious. The whole business was getting him down. He had already been to the housing supervisor to complain and to be told to try and live with it.

He returned to the supervisor and this time we were all summoned to a meeting. It lasted nearly an hour and Colin and I remained as observers. Dennis wanted Eric evicted. The point had already been reached where Dennis refused to let Eric into the bedroom on party nights, so Eric moved his bed into the lounge. Dennis made out a good case but then wilted and said we should make another attempt to live in harmony.

We had been in some weeks when Colin told me, "I've quit." I did not press him for a reason and he did not volunteer one. I fancied he felt the atmosphere in his office job oppressive. He said he wanted to join a brother in Australia but couldn't get a passage, so he was going home to his seriously ill father. After Colin's departure, I was allowed our room to myself. A week later, Dennis upped and left in a huff. He said it was because of Eric, but others said he had met new friends in the bunkhouse.

The gambling sessions declined sharply. Four times a week at their peak, they were down to a single session of poker in a fortnight. EJP had been losing heavily and was said to be deep in debt. One young man, owed nearly £150, confided, "Eric's hopeless at cards. It's like taking money off a baby!" Now guests were refusing to play without cash on the table.

Curiously, instead of living quietly and trying to pay off his debts, EJP continued his extravagant ways. He took lunch in the dining hall but got Pat to cook dinners in the house. His few remaining friends came occasionally for a meal and drinks. They kept a well stocked larder and fridge and appeared to thrive on waste and mess. Pat and another Irish girl were hopeless cooks and had to throw away a couple of pounds of lamb's liver they burned to a cinder.

They grilled bacon on the hot plate so that fat dripped into the electric cooker. Piles of dirty plates, glasses, tins and scraps were left overnight for the houseboy to clear. Eric suggested that we, he and I, apply for another house like this. Ye gods! Anticipating Foreign Service Vacation, FSV, he dashed off Royal Ascot, another poem for the Islander:

The sun blazes down on Bahrain's sandy soil,
The tap labelled Cold is approaching the boil,
There's a strong, inescapable smell of warm oil
(But they're racing at Ascot today).

Men coming off shift (just about on their knees)
Plod homeward in sweaty and stained dungarees
(At Ascot silk dresses sway under the trees
And the Royal Enclosure is gay).

Dear old Awali is baked in the sun
(At Ascot the four o'clock's just being run...
They're approaching the post - the favourite's won -
And the bookies make ready to pay!).

There's a June and July in my next FSV,
And it's Windsor - and Goodwood - and Ascot for me!

The bungalow had its moments of drama. That, declared Dennis, was the last straw, the reason he moved out...the play reading.

The Awali Repertory Theatre Society (ARTS) had no fixed abode and readings and rehearsals were held in various houses. When they came to our place, by EJP's invitation, they stayed till three in the morning and rocked with laughter most of the time.

By coincidence, Eric was given the lead role in *The Chiltern Hundreds*. Good living had rounded out his ample figure so that he looked like the Hollywood prototype of an English butler. Alas, it was not all right on the night. The stage was not his forte.

Back in the bunkhouse, Eric remained a force to be reckoned with socially. I rarely met him though a few times, when I went to the post office to buy stamps, I saw him on the other side of the counter. I assumed he was doing an audit or something. He was laying off the cards and repaying his debts. He had found a way of doubling

his salary, by becoming agent for a football pool in Liverpool on whose behalf for 12½ per cent commission he collected stake money and coupons from punters. By Christmas he satisfied all his creditors and then it was said he had found "other ways" of gambling which brought success. His stock rose. A party thrown on the strength of one big win in February was one of the most lavish I ever attended in Awali.

After a year's service, qualified for "local leave" of two weeks, he arranged to go to London with girl friend Pat. It was common gossip that Eric planned to spend extravagantly, taking in the Grand National and West End shows, etc, etc. He got off to a bad start, when his plane was 36 hours late leaving Bahrain. He had backed the National favourite, Freebooter, heavily - a hundred pounds allegedly - and I listened to the race on my crackling radio. Freebooter was lying second on the first circuit at Aintree but fell on the second. Hard luck, Eric!

But worse. Rumours circulated in Awali. His name was on the lips of all who knew him. The law was after Eric. He had been fiddling the pools. He wouldn't dare come back. "I'll give ten to one he won't return," hollered one of the gambling fraternity.

One of his friends, alarmed by the stories, wired a warning to Eric. On the appointed day, Eric and Pat failed to return. The next day the same. "There," said the clever ones, "told you so." In fact, the aircraft had engine trouble and was three days adrift. The couple came back. I told Eric about the man who had been offering ten to one against his return. "Wish I'd known," he said. "You could have put a tenner on for me."

The law, however, was after him. He was tried by the political agent for forgery, for converting to his own use cheques made payable to football winners. Now it came to me, those times I had seen him behind the post office counter. He must have postmarked envelopes in advance of getting the football results off the BBC and filling in winning coupons in the names of some of his clients. A dash to the airport could get the coupons on the earliest aircraft on the erratic service to London. The winners' cheques were all sent to EJP for distribution, but he paid them into his own account. Thus had he come into wealth by gambling in "other ways."

He pleaded not guilty in the agency court but was convicted and, because he had been stripped of his negligible assets, given a nominal sentence of 14 days. Things could have been worse. In the Islamic court, he might have been ordered to the penal island and forced to wear leg irons and to toil in the sun. In fact, he did rather well. The prison fort at Manama provided him with a modest room, family meals prepared by the governor's wife, tobacco, books and writing materials, and use of the phone. Friends dropped in. He even wrote a poem (what prisoner does not?) which was delivered to me with a note, "I'll bet they won't let you publish this, my final contribution - EJP." He would have lost his last bet.

His swan song, a totally irrelevant "Disclaimer," ran:

Apropos of nowt at all
And as an ex-Awali-ite
I'd like to say that Much Maligned's
A letter that I didn't write.
But, Much Maligned, take comfort
For the folk who cast a clod
Are the ones who should be saying
"There but for the grace of God..."

He was handed a Bapco letter, "Your services are no longer required," with his air fare to London. He bought a boat ticket to Bombay saying he planned "to start a new life in Australia."

A few friends went to Manama to see him off, unrepentant, cheerful as ever. Patricia, his helpmate, should have been at his side on the journey. Unfortunately, she went to Awali Hospital for a routine check up and was found to have tuberculosis. They booked her a flight to Ireland.

EJP doubtless shrugged it off as fate, another throw of the dice, another spin of the wheel. As he sailed away to Kipling's land, his plagiaristic muse must have whispered in his ear the Master's lines:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch and toss
And lose and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss...

FAMILIARITY breeds contempt, the reason, presumably, why the main claim to fame - the tumuli - aroused such little attention. Bahrain was the island of the dead, an ancient necropolis; if not the oldest, surely the largest. Serried ranks of dome shaped tombs marched for miles across desert, like dragon-toothed fortifications, a biblical Siegfried Line.

They were there for all to see, in vast numbers. How many? Who could tell? As well try counting the oysters at the pearling banks. Young Belgrave, the adviser's son, changed his estimate from 30,000 to 50,000. Reference books suggested 100,000 and 200,000. An oil worker who turned writer and authority plumped for about 400,000. Many were quite small, the size of a heap of gravel delivered by a builder's merchant. The biggest I judged to be about 40ft high, but authorities said some were over 80ft high and 100 ft in diameter and 3,000 years old.

Who built the grave mounds? Assuming corpses were interred, whose? Reliable answers were not forthcoming. A tiny population on a tiny island would have taken a long time to fill them, so the theory that dead had been shipped from the mainland was plausible.

The tombs at Aali, a large village between Awali and Manama, were massive, a few converted to pottery workshops and lime kilns. Squeezing through a narrow entrance to one, I found a perfectly designed interior. Below the surface of the earth were chambers forming a T shape, the long stroke the entrance and about four-ft wide; the short stroke some ten or 12ft long and three-ft wide. With an interior height of about seven feet, the sepulchre was made from carefully laid whitish-yellow limestone blocks, two to four feet in length and 18 inches to two-ft thick, of some weight.

These structures, presumably advanced for their time, hardly ranked as a wonder of the world - no match for the pyramids, for instance - though invention magnified their stature. An American

magazine, retailing True Stories, carried an account by a so called European nobleman, scholar and explorer of the opening of a tomb which revealed riches and ornament beside which Tutankhamen's trappings were negligible. In fact, amateur and professional diggers had found too few artefacts to come to any firm conclusions about the origins of the tombs and certainly uncovered no wealth. If the message of the tombs was indecipherable, it was still evidence of antiquity. In the absence of documentation, Bahrain's history was shaky and founded on speculation, which, recycled, tended to appear more positive. Thus, the remote chance that Bahrain was ancient Dilmun and the Garden of Eden developed into possibility and even probability. (This was not to be confused with the tiny satellite island of Umm Sabaan, which the ruler gave to Max Thornburg, a former Bapco manager and adviser to the US and Iranian governments. Thornburg entertained American and British visitors to his demesne which he had, according to reports, transformed into "a Garden of Eden," replete with palms and vines and pomegranates.)

The Dilmun theory would have connected Bahrain (which was also thought to be an early name for the Gulf coast of Arabia) to events of the third millennium BC. More certainty could be placed on the history of the last thousand years or so. It must have been a favourite target for marauders with its shallow seas and fresh water springs, both inland and offshore. It was claimed that drinking water could be tapped from the sea by diving to the bed and holding the mouth of a goatskin bag over the spring.

As Bahrain was attacked and settled from all directions, its character became confused, and tribal, racial and religious differences which developed persist today. It was for centuries dominated by Persia and frequently raided by Arabs. In 1522 the Portuguese came and remained as conquerors, with challenges, for 80 years. Throughout the 17th century, Persian governors ruled. After further incursions by mainland Arabs and Persians, a turning point was the arrival from Kuwait of the Khalifas, who shared ancestry with today's ruling families of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The Khalifas were merchants and their interests in the pearl trade brought them south in 1766 to Bahrain's neighbour, Qatar, where

they settled in the coastal village of Zubara and engaged in violent disputes with the local shaikhs and Persian and Arab forces. They gained a foothold in Bahrain before the turn of the 18th century, but decades of skirmishes with neighbours or family feuding were to pass before the Khalifas established firm control.

Whether this family would have gained paramountcy over Bahrain without the help of the British Navy is open to question. The navy was in the Gulf to quell piracy and slavery and to maintain whatever appeared to be the status quo in the shaikhdoms. In 1820, the Khalifa ruler signed the first of a series of treaties which established Britain as protector of Bahrain, a supposedly independent state. Under this protection, the Khalifa shaikhs consolidated a feudal system of government, while the British Government gained a valuable base on the Indian trade route.

The British military and maritime presence was paralleled by political and diplomatic activity. The Gulf came under India Office administration, and Persia, which Britain occupied in both world wars, provided bases for the Royal Navy and Britain's Political Resident in the Gulf until their transfer to Bahrain. Where Britain had treaty relations with shaikhdoms - notably Bahrain, Kuwait and the Trucial Coast - a political agent was appointed (with the rank of captain or major), answerable to the resident (customarily lieutenant colonel). These officials had a dual role - to safeguard Britain's interests and to handle the foreign affairs of the shaikhdoms.

It was the idea of an agent, Daly, it was believed that led to the appointment of a personal adviser to the Shaikh of Bahrain, a move that was to have a profound effect on the country. The adviser, Charles Dalrymple Belgrave, set foot on the island with his bride exactly 25 years before I did, and it fell to me to summarise that era as my journalistic baptism.

Belgrave suggested that the Bahrain Islander mark his silver jubilee, making available his annual reports which had been restricted to a small circle and printed only in English. Hundreds of large pages laid bare the work of his administration and life and development in the state in a style notable for its frankness. It was the sole account of modern history and I was disappointed when the Bapco management instructed me to trim it to two pages, under

2,000 words. In the event, I condensed it to four pages and the management cut it to three and struck out references to the company's royalty payments to the ruler.

Belgrave, charismatic and enigmatic, stood 6ft 4, an athletic figure. For an artist, his spidery, hieroglyphic scrawl was appalling. His hastily written memory of 1926, delivered staccato, was deciphered thus:

"25 YEARS AGO: About a dozen Europeans in Manama, including missionaries who have been here over 40 years. Shops sold no European goods and all food supplies from UK or India. No electricity. Drinking water brought in tins from steamers. Sea road from Agency to Customs not built. About a dozen private cars, no lorries or buses. Donkeys much used. Adviserate foundations started. Only hospital Victoria Memorial. Slow mail boats called every fortnight bringing mails. One or two artesian wells had been sunk, otherwise water was carried in on donkeys from springs in the gardens. No trees in Manama and in the gardens only a few varieties. The many varieties now growing, including oleanders, were imported later from Iraq and India. Some gardens had windmills to raise water from wells. European community: political agent and his doctor, Eastern Bank, American Missionaries, Director of Customs and a Levy Corps officer. Unusual to see an Arab wearing any sort of European clothes or shoes.

"Industry was the flourishing pearl industry. French buyers visited Bahrain during the season. Highest price one pearl £15,000. One school in Muharraq for boys. No girls' schools. No state medical service. Trip to Muharraq sometimes took two hours if tide low. Small sailing boats ran between Manama pier and Muharraq. What is now vegetable market was then in the sea, the shore was close to municipal buildings. The shore was along the edge of the houses which are now on the south side of Prior Road with creeks at intervals cutting inland. Customs square was sea. Cars could not enter the bazaar owing to narrow streets and lanes. Bazaar lanes were covered with matting to keep off sun and dogs lived on matting roofs over the streets. Muharraq was where all the important Arabs and shaikhs lived and was from local point of view more important than Manama. People going out at night had to

carry lanterns. State of public security not very good. Occasional raids on villages with shooting by Arab gunmen.

"Shaikh Isa lived in Muharraq, Shaikh Hamed was deputy ruler. Reforms in the diving industry produced some trouble and there was a good deal of feeling between Nejdīs and Persians. Living was very cheap. Manama a comparatively small town with many streets of barastis. No houses out beyond the palace. The pier was quite short and had one shed on it, the main sheds were on the site of the government shops in Barrett Road. Only government offices were the old customs house and court room on site of Bab al Bahrain.

"Police wore kafeyas and agals. No sea road at Muharraq and a creek running up into the town. Vegetable and meat markets in Manama were barastis. Mosquitoes prevalent in Manama and nets a necessity. Much malaria. Eye disease almost universal.

"On public occasions Arab dances were held; these have now died out as all the people are working. The site of Awali was frequented by gazelles and hares were coursed along the Awali road. The use of steel beams in building was unknown to local Arabs, very little cement was used - in its place 'juss' gypsum was used.

"There was no naval base at Jufair, naval and all other ships anchored off Manama. A deep open drain ran from the fort down to the biladya (municipal) garden and on to the sea, which was used for 'washing' by local dhobis! There were few Indians and very few foreign Arabs apart from Saudi Arabs and Persians. Not many people spoke English and beggars were rarely seen - and never small boys calling out for money! Ladies of the town did not appear outside!!" Thus wrote Belgrave.

Another who searched his memory - as a British agent - was Lieut Col G. Dalyell of The Binns, who first visited Bahrain in 1913. In a lecture given to the Royal Central Asian Society in 1938 he explained the Gulf's fascination as one of the last meeting places of past and present: "Imperial Airways calls twice a week, but blood money is still paid; oil derricks lift their ungainly heads, but succession is traditionally by parricide."

Dalyell recalled the British Government's reluctant intervention in the Gulf to protect the traders of the East India Company. There was, in the words of Lord Curzon, a viceroy of India and Foreign

Secretary. "constant trouble and disturbance; almost every man was a marauder or pirate; kidnapping and the slave trade flourished; fighting and bloodshed went on without stint or respite; no ship could put to sea without fear of attack; the pearl fishery was the scene of annual conflict; and security of trade or peace there was none."

All this, of course, was separate from 19th century fears that the Germans would take over Kuwait and the Russians penetrate Persia. So, by various treaties gaining a monopolist role, Britain had to take on responsibility for navigational aids, marine policing, post offices and quarantine. It also had the principal voice in arms traffic and oil.

In the first world war, the shaikhs stood by Britain. Dalyell told this story: "When the great Shaikh Mubarak of Kuwait acceded to the rulership in a welter of blood, we demurred at the old practice of putting out the eyes of near relatives in order to preclude a counter-rising, but said we would give them pensions and let them live at Bombay. Not unnaturally, Mubarak suspected that we did this merely to have someone handy to install in the shaikhdom if it suited us to do so later on, but the years passed by and there grew up a strong friendship and trust between Mubarak and ourselves." As a result, Mubarak helped Britain land troops to push the Turks out of Mesopotamia.

Noting the developing life style, Dalyell said the coming of the refrigerator meant that "one need no longer fear one's cook announcing, as mine did once, after weeks of tough and skinny fowls, 'There will be meat today as a camel has died in the suq.'"

He went on, "In Bahrain in the good old days, the shaikh used courteously to send his own white donkey to fetch the political agent. Arrayed in full uniform and mounted on this gaily caparisoned ass, I used to proceed slowly through the streets accompanied by a suitable retinue. I had a small switch and if I wished the donkey to go to the right I tapped his near shoulder, or if I wanted him to go to the left I tapped his off shoulder. If I wanted to stop, I leaned forward and tapped him lightly on the nose. Now I get into my Daimler car, but though I may have gained in comfort, I have lost romance."

Reviewing wider changes, he praised the Shah for transforming Iran into a modern state and establishing law and order. This enabled Britain to give up its bases there. Across the Gulf, Ibn Saud had established unknown law and order in his new kingdom. "There are few characters in history who have combined in their persons such courage in a military forlorn hope and such consummate statesmanship when that forlorn hope has been wrought into a kingdom... But in both cases, of Iran and Saudi Arabia, it would be unwise were we to forget that each has been built up by a dictator, and the time must come when the structure will be tested by the acid test of whether it outlasts its builder."

Oil was a new and disturbing factor in Gulf life. "Competition for oil is not carried on on philanthropic lines and is at times over-exciting. I would ask you to imagine, with sympathy, the feelings of that most simple of God's creatures, a political officer, when confronted by the Edgar Wallace-like atmosphere of big oil business." But once contending for a concession ceased, the companies proved most anxious to co-operate and "to avoid embarrassing us in local matters." Pleasant relations existed between Bapco and the political agency.

The reports filed by the political agents and residents were presumably the authentic histories, but their accuracy might leave room for doubt. Romanticism crept in, for sure. Villains and cut throats ruled, but they weren't bad chaps really. And, generally speaking, they were wise leaders. As for the commentators, the resident diplomats and agents, the clever journalists and the politicians passing through, most badly misread their crystal balls. Colonel Dalyell, who returned to Bahrain as agent, 1934-38, noted remarkable changes. He said, "Shaikh Isa ruled for over 50 years and represented the Gulf of ancient times. If one suggested any improvement, however trivial, he would merely reply, 'that is an innovation of which I cannot approve.' I have a very soft spot for the old man, but his rule consisted of extracting all he could from everyone and doing nothing in the way of governing, so that eventually we were forced, in the interest of the people and of foreign subjects (for we are charged by treaty with the foreign relations of Bahrain) to persuade him to abdicate in favour of his

son, who became deputy ruler. Isa died in 1932. His son and successor, Hamed, has with the help of advisers for finance, the Customs and police, completely reorganised the government."

Dalyell ended his lecture with a tribute to his wife. Chief guest in the audience, the Sultan of Muscat (condemned by Mrs Storm, the missionary, for his treatment of his wives and concubines) heard him say, "I owe my wife a great debt. She learnt Arabic and made firm friends of wives of ruling shaikhs in Bahrain and the Trucial Coast. Her friendship with their wives was of the highest value to me in my relations with the shaikhs, for the power behind the veil is immense and cannot be reached by a political officer himself."

Yet another qualified to make perceptive observations was Bapco's Grand Old Man, Ed Skinner, a product of the old school who paid his way through the University of California by oil work during vacation and, in 1916, joined a company that spawned Caltex. He drilled in South America, for five years in Venezuela.

Skinner, an unassuming, pleasant man headed the team of four Americans who arrived in 1931 to set up base camp and bring in Oil Well No 1. He was Bapco's founder general manager. He left in 1937. Twelve years later, after directing expansion in other parts of the Caltex empire, Ed came back to Bahrain to live with his wife, a pillar of St Christopher's Church committee, in a fine house the company built him in Manama.

Uniquely allowed to live outside the Awali compound, he was now vice president in charge of government relations and public relations, a kind of ambassador, carrying messages between the ruler and New York HQ. When, in 1951, he completed 35 years service, Ed Skinner looked back over a career that had taken him to all but two of the 21 Latin American states. He told the Islander that his biggest story was the history of improvement on Bahrain.

He said: "The Government has installed good schools and erected many fine buildings. And Manama now compares in cleanliness with the best in the Middle East. The ruler and the people are very friendly, and I think that Bahrain is unique in that the people seem better off than in almost any place I have been in - including Europe and America - because there is a job for everybody who wants to work. The Government is well run and, I think, very much for the

benefit of the population. They have for example excellent Customs control and laws; their duties are not ridiculously high as in many countries and smuggling cannot take place because there is no profit in it. Too bad some of those other countries don't take a leaf out of Bahrain's book.

"Bahrain is a progressive country. I attribute a great deal to the far-sightedness and liberal-mindedness of the Ruler himself and his advisers. The British Government, with which we have always kept good relations, did a good job of laying the foundations, but it took an enlightened Ruler to realise the value of them and then he got an excellent adviser in Mr Belgrave, who in turn brought in a fine staff of men."

Twenty years in Bahrain brought Skinner to these conclusions. Others, making an overnight stop, were no less impressed by what they saw or heard. Thus, a Conservative Member of Parliament, Dr Reginald Bennett, informed Daily Telegraph readers in February 1952, "In the last few weeks I have visited the three great independent shaikhdoms on the shores of the Persian Gulf: Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. United by treaties with the British Government, they are examples of absolute monarchy in its most benevolent form."

After explaining how fabulous wealth from oil was transforming the lives of poor sailors, pearl fishers and remote bedu in their tents, the MP went on, "The sagacious rulers of these states, with their conscientious advisers, whether Arab or British, are steadily driving ahead with 20th-century standards for their peoples. Out of this suddenly posed problem will come a whole new civilisation, as prosperity and enlightenment start a spiral of improvement."

Any gaps in the record of Bahrain's great leap forward to modernity were plugged by an expensive glossy Caltex book, bilingual, with pictures supporting the Arabic text repeated to illustrate the English. To most employees it would have meant nothing, pictures aside, for they could not read in any language.

The book began by claiming it was "the story of an ancient people, who, under wise, benevolent leadership, have adapted themselves to the demands of progress without sacrificing their traditions, the basic principles of life, or their cultural heritage. It is the story of

yesterday blending with today; of the development of a rich natural resource and the effects of this development upon a proud but friendly Middle Eastern race. It is the story of Bahrain.

"As far back as the written word of man goes, courageous Bahrainis were diving into the depths of the sea for pearls and building sturdy ships to carry their goods to all shores of the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. Literally, the Bahraini has proved himself the master, rather than the object, of changing conditions. To such qualities of adaptability and integrity may be attributed the high degree of public stability in Bahrain today.

"Illustrative of the progressive and enlightened government of the House of Khalifah is the ancient Arab proverb: 'As ye are, so shall your rulers be.' For about 170 years this noble House has successfully governed and protected Bahrain. In culture, the House of Khalifah has moved forward in time...promoted education. Achievements in public services abound in the records of government. Every Bahraini has the enviable privilege of personal audience with his Ruler."

The author of this panegyric observed that pearling went into decline. He went on, "The Koran teaches, 'Each is entitled to what he earns,' and 'Enjoy ye to the full what We have bestowed upon you.' So, with the sagacious and industrious people of Bahrain, it simply was a matter of changing the type of treasure to be furnished from the world: from pearls of the sea to oil of the earth.

"Bahrain today presents an impressive example of what can be accomplished by people from different countries and various cultures working together. It is a picture of world citizenship in action, with Bahraini, Indian, Pakistani, Iranian, Omani, Briton, American and others, living and working in a spirit of cooperation, in an atmosphere of complete understanding, trust and mutual benefit...

"Thus to the Shaikh and his people, for their progressiveness, intelligence and spirit of cooperation; to the British Government for its constructive role in guiding the country along a path of solid development, and to The Bahrain Petroleum Company, one of the Caltex Group, goes the credit for what has been accomplished in the vast metamorphosis of Bahrain.

"Drilling began in October 1931; oil was found on the 31 May 1932 at a depth of 2,008 ft...the first oil was shipped out in 1934. Within two years, the oil field was developed and a refinery, one of the biggest in the world, built. Thus did the hand of Providence transfer the prestige of Bahrain from the sea to the land.

"Seldom has British guidance reached a higher level of achievement than in the Persian Gulf. For about a century, a succession of British officials has aided in the free development of commerce... Illustrious names: Sir Charles and Lady Belgrave..."

This slim classic volume noted that more than ten per cent of all male Bahrainis, over 6,000, were engaged in oil and receiving medical, training and employee benefits. "The effect the oil industry has had upon the intellectual life of the people of Bahrain is no less than upon their physical wellbeing. Education is divided into vocational and academic training.

"Practically all Bahraini employees have had on the job training and, as a result, have advanced in responsibility and salary. About 78 per cent of all jobs are held by Bahrainis and this percentage increases each year. In many cases, they are taken off the job to attend courses in welding and machinists' schools, getting full pay. In 1948, 35 selected Bahrainis attended Zellaq school, on full pay, for a four-months course in English. Adhering to the Arabic proverb, 'Every new language you learn makes you into a new man,' they proved to be good students. The Bahraini is a staunch believer in the oft quoted words, 'Learn, young man, for indeed ignorance is a disgrace.'

"The field of private enterprise has become enlarged by former Bapco employees. Bahrain now has 21 bus companies, six construction contractors, five cinemas, numerous machine and welding shops, two laundries, a water distilling plant and a wholesale food company.

"In response to movement of population from outlying districts to central cities, the Government recently built a model low-cost masonry house in Manama for the purpose of receiving bids from local contractors on construction of 19 similar houses, for low rental. It is planned eventually to replace all substandard dwellings.

"With housing, education, medical and transportation needs taken care of, the remaining concern of the average man is the economic stability of family life and progress. The Bahrain Government has done an excellent job in this respect by checking inflation."

The book reported that between 1346 (1927) and 1351 (1932), government revenue, of which about 85 per cent was customs duties, was affected by the global depression, decreasing from £92,000 (US\$260,000) to £51,300 (\$143,000). But in 1352 (1933), with the first small but encouraging income from oil royalties, a steady improvement in economic conditions began. In 1370 (1951), the Government's total revenue was £1,882,500 (\$5,271,000), of which about 61% came from oil and 35% from customs. The company publication concluded, "Small wonder, therefore, that today finds Bahrain with impressive Government buildings and a Government program for providing the comforts of living for all Bahrainis. As the lights of the refinery pierce the midnight blackness, the average Bahraini is well content to have adapted himself to the benefits of progress without sacrificing his own or his country's proud traditions. He enjoys the spirit of Bahrain which manifests itself in the laughter of children or in the contentment of a worker operating his machine with the skill of an expert."

Leaving aside whether this was hokum, later known as Madison Avenue hype, the demented ramblings of a washing powder copywriter, it was fair to query if the author had ever been to Bahrain. And did he make up all those ancient Arab proverbs? I thought it was a scurrilous betrayal of Bahraini life.

The text did not appear as here but wrapped around pages of coloured pictures giving an idealised version of native life, native craftsmen, the fisherman casting his net, the handsome young Arab picking dates atop a palm tree, plus photos of Bahrainis and westerners sharing mundane but essential oil tasks. Script and illustrations were presumably designed to lend credence to each other. Enough truth was revealed - the dates and figures - to save the work from total ridicule, nevertheless I found it nauseating.

Maybe it had been written originally in Arabic and lost something in translation. When I spoke to a literate Arab of my concern, he

replied: "You think the English is poor? It is a pity you cannot read Arabic, it's worse."

Words I would have flung back at the copywriter were "Learn, young man, for indeed ignorance is a disgrace." This book, 'Bahrain 1952,' seemed to make little impact locally and was dismissed as company propaganda. I found nobody willing to discuss its contents. Perhaps it made more of an impression on shareholders in the western world and the State and Foreign Departments in Washington and Whitehall. A shame we could not know what those who commissioned the book thought of it. Its tone, whatever the intention, was distant from the truth as I perceived it.

I was present when Bapco handed over three schools to the Government. The company supervised the local contractors who did the building and paid their bills. When simple desks and blackboards were installed in simple classrooms, the whole complemented simple dispensaries in the isolated rundown hamlets of Toobli, Karzakkhan and Sanad. The 20th century had arrived.

Due ceremony was observed at two openings - police band, coffee and speeches in a desert setting - and His Highness the Ruler cut a ribbon at one and his old Uncle Abdulla (His Excellency The Minister of Education) performed similarly at another. Here, yet again, the spokesmen for government and oil company sought to outdo each other in felicitous phrases, but Abdulla scored highest marks for the English version of his address spoken by an official. The ruler's speechmaker merely implored the Almighty to guide the company in its future work.

In Abdulla's case, after expressing gratitude for the company's generous gift, his gracious address proceeded: "It is an indication of your highest motives, your noble impulses and the humanitarian feelings that fill your hearts.

"Gentlemen, I have been an eye witness to the educational revival in this home of ours. Over a period of 30 years, that covers three reigns of our good rulers...it has been touching to see how these three rulers, backed by their noble subjects, have devotedly and unsparingly sought to promote knowledge and spread enlightenment. Education has been the first and last goal...Bahrain has never failed to fulfil that noble mission towards her children.

We have mobilised all our resources and used them unsparingly to hasten the realisation of our sole ideal: free educational opportunities for all.

"While travelling this long distance to attain the higher levels of progress, our hearts are full of faith and hope. Our guide and torchlight is the wise law of trial and error, making the best use of our talents, experience, efficiency and those of others; desiring sincerely what is good and just.

"When the light of knowledge and learning, the spirit of co-operation and a wider vision cover the world, our planet will produce a finer and higher type of human race. This sordid daily fight for bread and butter will be done away with, material well being will be granted to everyone. Thus we shall rise above ourselves...With God's blessings."

Honeyed words, lofty sentiments. Did Shaikh Abdulla know what he was lending his name to? Solemnly delivered, the gracious address was received with polite applause by the routine coterie of diplomatic and oil company servants. It was a hot afternoon and nobody wanted to sit out in the sun longer than necessary and certainly not linger to discuss whether shovelling oil royalties into the Khalifa family's treasure chest was related to "this sordid daily fight for bread and butter."

After an Arabic newspaper died with its editor and the wartime radio closed down, Bahrain was bereft of indigenous media channels. In a substantially illiterate population, including the ruling Khalifas, the written word was of no great importance, not as compelling as the hostile words beamed by radio from distant Arab capitals. Nor, it seemed, were western expatriates particularly enchanted by words. The radio was not standard equipment in most Awali homes, less popular than the gramophone. Newspapers from home were less than avidly read and a quick scan of the company's bulletin board daily cull from BBC news adequately informed one of the existence of a world beyond Awali.

Company publications served a purpose, even when largely regarded as a joke. The best of the Islander, I thought, was a series of articles on Islam by Jimmy Dunne, head of Arab Personnel, and accounts of Islamic festivals by an employee who had taught in

Persia. Our local knowledge was abysmally limited but a suggestion I made to management for a series of lectures by an Arab was dismissed as irrelevant.

The idea that ignorance was bliss was corrupt, yet acceptable. Least said, soonest mended was a useful precept. The Gulf's diplomatic doyen, Rupert Hay, witness of countless changes, rebellions, conflicts, independence movements and the emergence of powerful oil industries demonstrated the value of a few words - "a few gracious words" - as reported by the Kuwait oil paper. Guest of Honour among leading Gulf oil figures at a dinner "he said he knew little about the oil industry, but all that he knew was to their credit."

Gilbert and Sullivan would have made hay in Bahrain. Ideal setting of sun and sand and sea. Sharply delineated cast. Splendid costumes requiring no alteration or replacement. Male parts only, of course. Problem with the principal players, however - used only to walking on roles; uttering lines, if at all, as asides, inaudible to the audience; but doing their best work behind the scenes.

The Establishment I met for the first time in an industrial setting. Young Shaikh Ibrahim was breaking new ground for the Khalifas; or old ground, for the rock of ages we were standing on, the desert's limestone surface, was his raw material. The family had been in pearl marketing once but never industry. In force, they turned out for the official opening of the mechanical kiln. It was a shrewd move, with a construction boom on the way, but it represented advanced technology - a tub of limestone was hauled up a ramp and tipped at the top into a five-ft diameter chimney and white powder came out at the bottom. But its economy of scale looked menacing to the labourers seen scattered about the barren landscape with long jemmys to prise up rock for their little kilns.

Ibrahim, almost delicately small and slim, with a neat Van Dyke beard which went well with his gold-edged black robe, looked better suited to a salon than operating a mill. On a patch of scorched earth under a declining sun, all the nobility assembled for an occasion both solemn and ceremonial. The family males, the adviser Belgrave and big noises from Bapco waited patiently. As HH arrived in his limousine, the red and white national flag was broken atop the kiln. When he alighted, his family in rust coloured robes pressed

forward and engulfed him. A small scruffy crowd from a nearby village gathered round him, bowing respects. Then the company men joined in, shaking hands with the ruler in strict order of precedence: senior vice-president, general manager, refinery manager, chief accountant and so on.

This Grand Opening of the Kiln was a silent one: no speeches. We sat on canvas chairs in the shade of a palm branch hut, two rows of Arabs and one row at right angles for Bapco men (in order of seniority). Sundry minor shaikhs arrived in huge cars at intervals and we had to keep bobbing up for each one. At last we sat for good. Palace servants came round with chocolates, fly covered sweet biscuits and some dirty little shelled nuts. Tiny cups, shared unwashed, were filled in turn with strong black coffee, sweet Earl Grey tea, then Turkish coffee. Next each guest extended his right hand to receive a sprinkling of rose water from an attendant, and finally a smoking dish of incense was brought round and everyone took a quick sniff. The ensuing tour of the works was basically the shaikhs and the oil chiefs photographing each other with their expensive cine-cameras.

On another day, I went back to Ibrahim to see his farm, so called, a garden near the kiln sprouting a few corn plants, some melons and clusters of wilting tomatoes. He reckoned he had a farm in Manama as well, presumably a smallholding, and spoke blithely about his progressive methods as though irrigation and manuring with animal droppings and fish had just been invented. When I mentioned my own days on the farm and poultry rearing, his eyes shone. "Ah, look!" He pointed to some cases stacked carelessly in a ditch; incubators and brooders waiting to be unpacked. He was about to go into poultry and was uncertain when and whence the eggs would come. It would have been easier to send for a few dozen day old chicks by air, but if he wanted to learn the hard way, so be it.

The gathering of the clans at the kiln enabled me to see all the levers of power together, the first of many state occasions.

While any of them might deny a capacity to influence or interfere in public affairs, in their various ways they did precisely that. Representing government were His Highness Shaikh Sir Sulman bin Hamed Al Khalifa KCIE and his adviser, Charles Dalrymple

Belgrave; for the oil company Russell M Brown, vice-president and general manager, and Ed Skinner; and for Britain, His Excellency Lt Col Sir Rupert Hay, KCIE, CSI, His Britannic Majesty's Political Resident in the Persian Gulf.

Shaikh Sulman liked dressing up and having his picture taken. But as a pioneer of the photo-opportunity, he betrayed in his demeanour no hint of vanity. He was squat, his face masked by a heavy beard. His heavy eyes, cheekbones and the tips of his fingers were the only evidence of a human form lurking within and weighed down by a gross accumulation of finery; ever colourful as a peacock, as bedecked with baubles as a Christmas tree. Seek out in pictures any commander the length and breadth of the Gulf, none was arrayed as one of these, Sulman and his sons, Isa, Khalifa and Mohammed.

From the gold-thread aqal, worn as a crown to hold in place the delicately woven headscarf, down to the scuffed brogue shoes there was elegant splendour, the brocaded and figured trailing gown, perhaps emerald or lilac, overlaid by a tan or cream coloured cloak; stars of knightly orders suspended by ribbons about the neck, a long sword by the side and, tucked into a waistband, a curved dagger in a gold scabbard with a wristwatch inset.

Was such brilliance meant to conceal some defect? Impossible. Distinguished men in diplomacy and oil never hesitated to assert that here was a mortal, like those who came before him and those who would follow him, of unique character and wisdom. Perhaps at times he was the victim of editorial licence or imagination, as illustrated by a claim in Time magazine: "Sulman's memory is phenomenal, he remembers which oil driller's wife is having a baby. He takes all the newspapers, listens regularly to the Arabic radio broadcasts. When Moscow Radio calls Belgrave a 'dictator' Sulman chuckles, twits his 9,600 dollars a year adviser."

Sulman was born to rule. His grand vizier, Belgrave, with his breeding and background was cut out for the job. They contrasted oddly, Belgrave incredibly tall, Sulman impossibly short.

Belgrave was well groomed in public, still handsome with a nice taste in dark, well cut suits, apart from the grey morning suit which he wore on state occasions and which, tailored for a slimmer prewar frame, was now skin tight and creaked with every movement. He

had preserved a rangy kind of physique, after 25 years as adviser, appropriate for one who served as a young officer in the Camel Corps.

Rupert Hay, steeped in the politics of the area, was of the generation of key figures in Bahrain, all in their fifties and early sixties. He had worked with the legendary politicians in Iraq, Gertrude Bell, Sir Percy Cox and Sir Arnold Wilson, during and after the First World War. In 1936 he became Deputy Foreign Secretary to the Government of India and later Gulf Resident under the India Office, based in Iran.

In 1947, India gained independence and Hay's link with India was severed. The resident was now directly responsible to the Foreign Office in London. Yet the spirit of limited Indianisation remained in Bahrain, making Hay the last of the Raj. Unobtrusively safeguarding Britain's interests, he was a tall, overweight man with cropped moustache and could have passed for a bank manager, except on ceremonial occasions when, in black levee livery of tail coat and cocked hat, he was portly Pickwickian.

The ruler - every Khalifa to hold that office - was "wise and beneficent" or "far seeing and generous." The range of synonyms and platitudes was limited but to the point. Hardly a building was erected, a schoolroom or a hospital ward opened, a road laid or a job created which did not bear the imprint of the shaikh's munificence.

I never heard Shaikh Sulman make a speech. But I watched him listening to the speeches of others, the deathly prose, larded with wisdom and beneficence. He sat patiently immobile, unsmiling, inscrutable. It was stuff he had heard before and would hear again and again. He never protested, though I doubt he believed a word of what was said. And whether those who sang his praises believed a word of it...who could tell?

Sulman would be remembered in pictures, for he invariably at any ceremony lingered as long as any, many or few, poked cameras in his direction. But the image he wanted to project, as master in his own house, was constantly denied him until 1953, when he was allowed to replace the British monarch's head on postage stamps with his own, though only on low value internal mail. At the same time, he boldly expunged Bahrein (as in Bahrein Petroleum Co, the

Bahrein Islander, the name on countless letterheads, maps and seals) and replaced it with Bahrain.

The island government was basically the ruling shaikh and his adviser. The structure which Belgrave either instituted or refined took care of tax gathering and expenditure on health, education, police and fire services, public buildings and works and justice. Some departments were nominally headed by a Khalifa shaikh, though effectively controlled by a Briton or an Indian civil servant.

The oil company, too, had a government, the Caltex cabinet in New York made up of a president, a chairman, and a host of vice-presidents, each with responsibility for a department: prospecting, production, refining, transport, marketing, etc. Most were men in the last decade of their careers, men risen from lowly jobs and still driven by the American work ethic and the American Dream. In many ways, ruler and oil company followed a parallel course. Both recognised the reinforcing effect of wealth and power; both were assumed to wield absolute power. Words used in a host of publications to describe one might easily apply to the other, thus: feudal, benevolent dictatorship, self perpetuating oligarchy, benevolent autocracy, enlightened self interest.

In any society, even a repressive dictatorship, it behoves the governor to sound out the governed and maybe come to an accommodation with them. The ruler had his twice a week majles at which any subject could demand an audience to petition for a favour, a pardon or redress of a grievance. Leading merchants were summoned to discussion. From such informal meetings, the ruler might gauge public opinion and govern accordingly. That was the theory.

In the oil business, headquarters laid down the strategy and management in the field devised the tactics of government. Hints of democracy had an inbuilt snag: they could be overruled. Awali had no majles. Anyone with a bleat could presumably go to his supervisor, but the general tendency was not to pursue complaints. If pressure built up, the escape valve was resigning. On occasion, an anonymous call to revolt over some change in pay or conditions was surreptitiously pinned on dining hall and refinery notice boards, but nothing ever came of it.

Taking account of Bapco's many provisions for the welfare of its white employees and families, the majority had seemingly little grounds for complaint. Materially, they had more than they could expect in Britain. From the managers' side, they were no doubt convinced that they were doing their best under trying conditions. What irked me was being a political eunuch, without a vote or a say in anything, being dictated to in my job and denied the chance of doing it properly. A company regulation banned participation "in local politics."

A report of an oilmen's conference in the States in 1951, which argued that bad communications demoralised employees, said: "Most employees want to share the viewpoint of good management but unless they have been told the management's thinking they can not share it."

The Caltex men who handed down decrees were busy men; too busy building an empire, maybe, to heed the finer concerns of their colonies. They were hard headed men, conscientious, loyal and industrious, these being the qualities which took them the top, not politicking and questioning decisions.

What kept them traversing continents in search of oil, halting for long years in strange lands and inhospitable climates: romance and adventure or just money?

Had ambition or long service alone guided Russell Brown to the summit as general manager of Bapco, in charge of a 7,700 payroll and 950 wives and children? He was proud of his humble start as a soap salesman who made a few bucks on the side playing the saxophone before he became an oil rig worker. He was in Bahrain when the number one refinery unit went on stream in 1937 and he remembered its birthday every year with childlike affection.

Brown did not stand out in a crowd and chewing gum was his only observable characteristic. His roomy office in the Awali admin block was not far from my shared office, but I was never summoned into his presence nor indeed formally introduced. We communicated by memo or third parties. He was avuncular when dispensing cookies and cola to kids playing Halloween tricks and he still kept in with buddies from the old days. But now his milieu was the Manama set, the diplomats, the Raj. He and his wife attended their cocktail

assemblies and fancy dress parties, and only deigned to appear on home territory when the Manama crowd were invited to Awali to dine and dance as guests of the Scottish Society.

Merit, not the old boy network, was the path to the top in Caltex. HQ based Howard M Herron rose to Caltex chairman via tank building in Oklahoma, stenographer, then head clerk in a refinery, superintendent of shipping terminals and president when Caltex was formed in 1936. In the course of little more than a decade, he oversaw the planning or commissioning of refineries in Holland, France, Italy, Spain, the UK, India and Australia, as well as Middle East and Pacific prospecting and operations elsewhere.

In a company journal, Herron wrote: "It has always been and always will be the policy of Caltex to give any country in which it operates the maximum economic, educational and social benefits." After outlining benefits, particularly in education and training, he recorded thanks to the distinguished ruler of the independent shakhdom of Bahrain for his generous understanding. "Caltex's political, economic and industrial associations with His Highness have always been carried out with the utmost congeniality."

Supreme command had recently passed from Howard Herron to William Henderson Pinckard, a captain in the first world war and later managing director of Texaco operations in the Philippines and China. No slouch, he was admired by a trade journal for "his organising ability and technique of elastic strategy. He has a remarkable ability to handle any problem with what might be described as controlled imagination; producing, if necessary, an unorthodox solution within the etiquette and accepted practice of business. In other words, he is a true executive."

On the affairs of the Khalifas, but feeble light was thrown. What were they up to? They were a large tribe, always marrying within the family. Sulman had seven brothers, but no sisters were ever mentioned. If any were born, were they allowed to survive? What did they all do? Did they work, other than nominally occupying government posts? There was vague mention of sport - hawking, hunting gazelle - and the ruler owned the vast majority of horses on the island yet apparently never mounted one. Did they ever read a book (or could they)?

Belgrave could not escape the spotlight (perhaps he welcomed it) when a profile drawn by a journalist, James Bell, in a long article in Time-Life in 1952 revealed "an awe inspiring specimen" who carried his 200 pounds of bone and muscle like a guardsman and wore "gay checked shirts with loud pink ties and horse-blanket plaids." Bell described him as "A big shy man with a pronounced stutter," yet added further on, "He remains shy, soft spoken, only recently conquered his stammer."

The prelude to Belgrave's appointment was strife. According to Bell, "For 54 years, Shaikh Isa had run Bahrain as a primitive feudal state and in the early 1920s, in a state of doddering senility, he handed over to his eldest son, Hamed. This incensed the populace, who preferred a younger son, Abdulla, and lawlessness became rife."

The Manama the adviser brought his bride to in 1926 was "a crumbling mud walled town filled with noisy people who lived in incredible filth. In the waterfront bazaar, flies swarmed over the stinking meat that hung in open butcher shops, clung to the diseased eyes of children sick with trachoma and harassed the flanks of the little white Bahrain donkeys."

Spectacular progress meant in 1951, "Six hospitals manned by 400 doctors, nurses and attendants providing free medical care for all Bahraini citizens." One hospital alone during the year cared for 120,000 outpatients, 2,300 in patients, performed 4,244 operations and gave more than 25,000 inoculations and vaccinations. "The Bahrainis who once feared doctors on religious or superstitious grounds now line up cheerfully for 'shots.'"

Belgrave had not found it easy to help the tradition bound and illiterate masses to help themselves, wrote Bell, but modern day Bahrain was a testament to his success. He had "persuaded shaikhs and western oilmen that it is only enlightened selfishness to share their wealth with the people."

There was praise on all sides for Belgrave's innovations and when the World Bank president, Eugene Black, congratulated Shaikh Sulman on his excellent administration, the shaikh replied: "What we do here is due to our adviser Mr Belgrave. We consider him to be not an Englishman but a Bahraini. He is my hand."

A day in the life of the adviser was painted in intimate detail by the journalist, from the time his Persian butler, Musa, woke him at 6.15 with tea. First the 90-minute tour of inspection on horseback of Manama, the inspection of his men at the police fort, then bathing and breakfast. From 9 am, work in the office downstairs, with the constant stream of telephone callers and visitors, followed by a heavy lunch, an hour's gardening before tea, then a drive or a long walk before dressing for cocktails and dinner for VIP guests. Four servants ran the household, mainly for the benefit of visitors. Mrs Belgrave rated a mention in the article: coming in for lunch from her work as director of girls' schools and retiring to her air conditioned bedroom at 11pm, when her husband bedded down on an outdoor terrace to show his contempt for mosquitoes.

Two mornings a week, "Sulman arrives in his sleek Rolls, his usually dancing eyes serious and his attitude one of serious intensity. From time to time he digs into his robes for a packet of British Gold Flake cigarettes. Shaikh Sulman is intensely interested in everything that goes on, from technical discussion of public works to oil camp gossip. Belgrave addresses him as 'Your Highness' and speaking to others always refers to his employer as His Highness." Belgrave never initiated a course of action without getting the shaikh's prior approval.

According to Time, Belgrave had met opposition at every turn, but had got his way in opening the first girls' school after Marjorie Belgrave "got to work cultivating Hamed's favourite wife." He expanded hospitals despite claims that he was interfering with the will of Allah, and introduced a national census which was opposed as a sinister Western plot.

The story continued: "Only once has Belgrave personally substituted violence for patience and persuasion. That was in 1947, when the partition plan for Palestine raised Arab tempers throughout the Middle East. A gang of bazaar toughs, reinforced and possibly inspired by dhow crews in port from Kuwait and other Gulf states, surged forth to wreck the shops and homes of Bahrain's 500 Jews. Belgrave was in his office when word reached him that a Jewish home was under attack. He sprinted to the bazaar area and

waded into the crowd, his big fists swinging and his powerful legs kicking.

"Belgrave fought his way to the top of the stairs of the Jewish home that was being pillaged. All alone (his police were working on the rioters from the periphery of the mob) he started clearing away the attackers. Whenever a rioter came within reach, Belgrave lifted him over his head and hurled him down the stairs into the faces of his comrades. This bowling hall technique ended the riot in about 10 minutes, word spreading rapidly that the Mustashar was settling this one personally. Belgrave marched home in gigantic dignity, his legs raw, his fists bleeding, his clothes torn and his bruised face radiant. Manama's respect for the Mustashar reached a new high that day, and since then Bahrain's Jews have lived in peace and friendship with their Arab neighbours." Bell concluded: "Bahrain has not yet achieved full political democracy. There is no central legislative assembly. Belgrave's decisions, when endorsed by the shaikh, have the force of law. There is no free press (Belgrave censors the only publication, a monthly). Neither the problems nor the critics upset Belgrave. He knows he has the support of 99.9 per cent of Bahrain's residents, native and foreign."

The magazine report was obviously based on an interview with Belgrave. Whatever else might be deduced, it gave the impression of two men - ruler and adviser - at arm's length, meeting formally a couple of times a week and irregularly at public ceremonies, and otherwise having nothing in common either socially or culturally. Belgrave the bruiser, in his 50s, defending Jews, had a ring of editorial licence, but he referred to it in his own writings later when he revealed he was not alone facing the mob. He had a police inspector and a driver with him and they together seized bodies and threw them down on companions advancing up the stairs. In one house, where terrified women and children cowered as Persian and Omani looters smashed doors, "we tackled the men with our fists and soon a number of them were on the floor. There was some rope in the room so we trussed them up, to be called for later. We went to another house where we were joined by more police; they helped us to secure the raiders who had retired to the roof. We had a tough scrap and I used my knuckles to such effect that they were quite

raw. I was glad that I had learned to box at school, but it was many years since I had used my fists. I was covered in mud and blood, my clothes torn."

But he could draw the line at methods of violence. When a levy went berserk in 1926 and shot his officer, and the ricocheting bullet took a piece out of political agent Daly's ear, the assassin was condemned to death by hanging. New to his job, Belgrave had to make the arrangements, but he had no stomach for it and insisted that "the wretched man" be executed by firing squad, a deed done in front of a large crowd.

He was both reclusive and gregarious. As a magistrate, or judge as he preferred to be known, he sent offenders to Jidda, then used them to build his stonewalled retreat on the convict island where he spent his weekends in splendid isolation. There he might like a prophet of old have gazed heavenwards to seek divine inspiration for the statesmanlike tasks he had been sent to perform. In fact, as he admitted, he devoted himself to swimming, catching the breeze, watching migrating birds and fishing.

At home in The Adviserate he loved candlelit dinners and parties which went on incessantly in winter. He was entertainer, host, the man of taste and culture who designed public buildings and furnished palaces, while arranging the flowers for state occasions, introducing alien flora to the island and painting watercolour landscapes and the scenery for children's ballet and writing pantomimes.

He could be aloof too. It might have been a pose, to invite notice. At official gatherings, he often stood aside. A photo I took was almost typical: in a new schoolroom, visitors milled around while Belgrave stood in one corner like a naughty schoolboy, hands cupped over his mouth, lighting one of his endless store of little cheroots.

He was too large to be missed and indeed he loved a parade. As commandant of police, astride his Arab mare, he revelled in leading his police force, his horse mounted section, his camel corps - his inventions - and the police band, a ragged mob smartened up with khaki drill tunics and scarlet turbans, whose total ignorance of music and instruments was transformed after Belgrave whistled

Marching Through Georgia or played other tunes to them on his gramophone.

As state treasurer, Financial Adviser, Belgrave always budgeted cautiously, keeping something in hand even in lean years. The first call on revenue was the one-third of oil royalties to the privy purse, to the Khalifa family. Income in 1369 AH (1950) totalled £1,275,377, including £703,740 oil royalties, £453,352 customs dues and £43,005 interest on reserves. Major items of expenditure were: £279,292 ruling family allowance, £51,825 civil service, £13,695 judiciary, £87,533 education, £82,950 health, £87,420 police, £307,755 public works, £190,365 capital expenditure and £75,555 surplus for investment. Two years later, oil income and the privy purse jumped 100 per cent.

In his various duties, Belgrave was not merely grand vizier but the government itself, or so it appeared. Such an idea he eschewed, yet, while the ruling shaikhs disposed, he took the vital first step of proposing and persuading. He was the supreme initiator, advancing bright ideas, for postmarks like "Bahrain, Pearl of the Gulf," for designing public works. Strangely, from his lofty position, he was content to be regarded not merely as a servant but servile.

5 Custom and practice

THE PEARL ('lulu' in Arabic) is the national symbol of Bahrain in recognition of the centuries of economic dependence on it. Retrieving pearls from the deep, 30 to 60 feet of water, was a simple, primitive act: the diver, lowered to the sea bed on a rock-weighted rope, hacked at oyster clusters with his knife, scooped a dozen shells into his bag, tugged at the line and was hauled to the surface.

Over hundreds - some said thousands - of years, the industry's methods had remained unchanged. The sun blackened diver, near or totally naked, clipped a peg on his nose before plunging overboard and held his breath for two minutes, a little more or less. Modern diving apparatus, even unsophisticated, was ruled out for it would have ensured the loss of thousands of jobs and a way of life.

Men from the inhabited coast all the way from Kuwait down to Oman regularly sailed to the pearling banks for four months in the summer, scores of thousands in locally built wooden craft. Bahrain had known years when almost the entire labour force of able bodied men downed tools in shore jobs and boarded the vast armada. A full crew might number 40, a captain in charge of divers and pullers, an odd job man and a cabin boy.

It was a precarious living of tedium and discomfort aboard, a light simple daily diet of dates and rice improved by their own catch of fish, and the prospect of ending the venture in debt. Wages were payment by results, income from the pearl haul being shared in scaled proportions among the shipowner, the master and the crew. By custom, the men were paid signing on advances which could exceed their ultimate share of the catch. If in debt at the end of the voyage, they were bound to the ship and future expeditions until the debt was cleared. Until reforms in the 1930s, a diver's debts and obligations became at his death the burden of his sons.

For communities who relied on pearling to survive, oil came at the right time. Depression between the two world wars reduced demand for pearls, while Japanese cultured pearls were undercutting the market in natural pearls. The oil companies, by offering steady work and regular wages, encouraged labour to forsake pearling.

Devoting a rest day to observing someone else at work was not a popular idea among Awalians, but I readily assented when offered a trip to the pearling fleet. The right day had to be awaited, when the fierce north wind, the shamaal, had abated. A colleague in Accounts gathered an Irish group together and our Bahraini guide, young Amer from Arab Personnel, hired a launch.

We set out at five in the morning from a silent Awali, wet steaming mist shrouding the street lights. Night turned slowly to dark grey as our taxi sped towards Manama. A large dog bounded crazily from shadowy desert and lunged at the vehicle. Through the looming humidity we met the dark figure of an early traveller. As greyness lightened, bodies crept stiffly from their beds under a metal roof on stilts by the roadside. On the edge of Manama, Arab labourers were already busying themselves mixing concrete for a building job, while the shrill cry of an unseen rooster threatened to wake the town. We crossed the empty causeway and halted at the quayside of Muharraq, and through the mist discerned a departing dhow passing an incoming wartime landing craft, while small boys cast lines from moored boats in hopes of catching a breakfast.

Around seven o'clock, the sun forced a path through the heavy atmosphere. The tiny harbour came slowly to life and several inquisitive townsmen gathered at the sea wall as our launch arrived. We victualled ship, stowing in shade two cases of beer, a large flask of lemonade and a barrel of ice and boxes of sandwiches. There was plenty for all, half the expected party being absent.

We settled down on the flush deck, just above the water, six passengers, one a woman, and Amer. The helmsman assumed his post, his mate cast off and then laid fishing lines astern and we were away. As we took a light breakfast, we watched shoals of small glistening fish leaping out of the water ahead. The mist cleared as the sun rose and calm water turned slightly choppy.

Soon after 10 o'clock, the outlines of several large dhows indicated our goal, and dark patches under the pale green sea signalled shallows. We eased alongside a squat dhow tossing at anchor to exchange greetings with her sailors and divers, men draped with a small cloth round their middles; stubble chinned, poll shaved men who looked surprisingly old and wizened. On deck amidships, another ebony skinned group sat round a struggling open fire on a hearth of clay, a pot of coffee simmering in the embers. Some sucked contentedly at ornate smoking pipes whilst an ancient, bearded sailmaker worked unhurriedly on his canvas. It was the sabbath but a working day.

This dozen strong fleet had come from Oman and as we proceeded through it, crews lined the rails to wave and shout. Idleness had been forced on them, for the sea, though only lightly whipped by wind, was too troubled for diving. Beyond other small groups of diving ships, we came across ten from Muharraq and were heartily hailed. Aging white-bearded men, small boys, young men of fine physique all rose from the decks and peered with excited eyes from the shadows of canvas awnings. By invitation, we clambered aboard a larger vessel, a merchant's dhow, and took seats on long cushions on the high stern in the company of four pearl buyers clad in thin, white cotton robes.

The host served coffee and sweet biscuits. It was a pleasant noon hour, beneath awnings flapping in the breeze, sharing warm smiles, creating a babble of Arabic and English. Hundreds of newly won little pearls, wrapped in crimson handkerchiefs, were passed gingerly from hand to hand and admired. But what we had come to see was not to be, the divers in action.

Given a choice of swimming in ten feet of water or taking a boat to the fish traps, I opted for the latter. Four muscular young men propelled the boat with disc-bladed oars, matching strokes to a chant. Two rowers sang a line of verse and all followed with a four or five syllable chorus. Voices rose and quickened above the splash of their oars and soon we were at the traps. Hauled up, the wire cages revealed wonderfully coloured fish lured by oyster bait: flat fish, grey backs daubed with brilliant yellow; fish with crimson beneath their gills; another flat fish with a head all too like a human

face in profile; a few examples of the 500 marine species said to inhabit the Gulf. Relieved of prisoners, the cage was secured again by a boatman who plunged with it to the seabed.

Back on our launch, we headed north in the belief that diving could be taking place there, but we ran into a heavy swell, dipping and heaving, and had no choice but to turn about. The retraced course passed through the ranks of pearling ships, their lofty sterns hung with all manner of tackle - ropes, traps, pots, canvas, spare oars and anchors - like a pedlar with all his wares on his back.

The way back to Muharraq was quiet: no boisterous laughter and banter of the early morning, when we set out with excited anticipation. Only our engine chattered as we stretched out, dozing on rugs. Then a line jerked and somebody shouted and everybody sprang to attention. A sailor grabbed the line and swiftly hauled in a fish quite two feet long which was unhooked and stowed below deck. Excitement subsided and when a passenger in the bow cried "Shark!" the crew displayed utter disinterest, leaving the trippers to debate whether the black shape now disappearing under our bow belonged to a shark or a porpoise. Back in port, the helmsman said how sorry he was that we had been disappointed. But it had been a splendid day marked not least by warm hospitality.

On another expedition, I went alone to see the tombs at Aali, a large village of many hundred souls. Leaving the Bapco bus on its way to Manama, I followed a winding sandy track for two miles, crossing narrow streams of running water and dried up channels that disappeared into the date groves around the village. As the palms abruptly parted and the settlement came into view, I was surprised to find so many stone dwellings and so few barastis. The villagers were for their part surprised to see a stranger, a foreigner, on this stifling sabbath and women and girls hastily covered their faces and darted out of sight. Through narrow rough stone lanes I wandered, the houses on either side wearing varying stages of decay.

The main street stretched barely a couple of hundred yards and before I reached its end, the horde was upon me, a dozen teenagers swooping from side alleys with cries of "Baksheesh! Floos!" Not

pausing to determine whether I understood, they gabbled on in a questioning tone as though every word made its mark.

I brushed them aside. Here and there lay heaps of snow white powder, lime that had been blocks of stone hacked from the surrounding desert before fragmentation and baking in the kiln, a burial mound or a small clay house fired by palm wood. On the fringe of Aali I came upon the tombs. Compared with the majority measuring six-ft high with a 12ft base, these were massive. I wondered if I was stepping into sacred territory, but the boys who were following me raised only feeble protest when I signified my intention of entering excavated tombs.

One entrance was so small that I could only just squeeze through and as I did so a small cascade of stones rolled into the tomb. None of the boys entered with me, but one spread his dirty loose garments over the way in, blocking the strong sunlight to diminish my prospect of taking interior photos.

Wherever I walked, the ragged band followed, at intervals encircling me, yelling for money. "Later, later," I told them. At one spot we came close to a party of men, seated on the ground in earnest conversation. The instant they saw me, they rose as one, whooping "Baksheesh, floos! Miskeen" - "Poor!" - and cupping extended palms. It was a game, but as I wouldn't play they slunk back to their meeting ground.

I shared some cigarettes among the boys, momentarily placating them. But the more pictures I took, the louder grew their clamour for money. They began to chant derisively. I faced them, waving my arms as though conducting a choir. Realising they were having little effect, they changed tactics, jumping in front of my camera each time I tried to snap a kiln or some other object. I told them to hop it. At this they started bawling their heads off, and another crowd of village boys came over at a smart pace. By now the party was about two-dozen strong and all were yelling. Some of the smaller boys picked up stones and faced me menacingly. I felt sure harming me was more than they dare do. I looked at the odd lad, sternly told him it was bad and the stone was dropped.

I signified I was leaving and my followers kicked up an unholy racket. As they chanted they clapped their hands in rhythm and I

had no doubt they were heaping curses on my head. I joined in the clapping. As I trudged away, weaving a path through the mounds, I could hear the youngsters still shouting as they ambled back to the village. I had profited by the experience; and the lads had won a cigarette or two and an energetic tramp into the bargain. My way back was strewn with small sharp stones and flints and my steps produced an eerie, hollow sound, like footsteps in an empty room.

Dining alfresco in Bahrain was not to my taste. It wasn't downing the sheep's eye with a gulp - that ceremony we were spared - rather the competition to get at the food. A decent Arab meal with everyone (sans women, of course) sitting or squatting on the ground could occupy two or three sittings, first the seniors attacking the carcass, then the second string making inroads, and finally juveniles and hangers-on picking over the bones.

A popular Bapco supervisor, going home after 17 years, was honoured with a feast by his Arab workers. At noon on the Muslim sabbath, at a secluded spot outside a village, a roll of woven material was laid out like cricket matting, pitch length, on the bare earth. That was the table cloth. Strips of matting along either side were the seats.

As the food arrived, so did the flies. Huge dishes of rice supported massive joints of roasted lamb. Large tureens were filled with sloppy curried vegetables. As covers were removed, all the flies in creation swooped. It was, to say the least, disconcerting. Not just the battle with the flies, but trying to find a sitting posture that was either comfortable or efficient for food gathering. It was truly a hand to mouth operation, with the right hand wrenching off a chunk of meat, mixing it with a handful of rice to mould into a ball and then forcing it into the mouth, using the same hand to scoop up the diced veg. Some soggy custard dish was served as dessert and with this old spoons were provided.

A dozen Europeans squatted for the first sitting, with a like number of Arabs to guide us through the rituals. My usual healthy appetite disappeared and I treated delicately what seemed an unsavoury affair. How different was the relish of the Arabs, those who threw the party, when they replaced us. Abandon was the art. Seizing whole joints in their right hands, tearing at the flesh like

vultures, they were down to the bare bones in no time. Then, using a jaw bone, they prised open the sheep heads to consume the brains. Genuine bedouin, no doubt, but I preferred our dining hall.

Getting off the island for a holiday and to recharge the batteries was no bad thing. Expatriates got two weeks off midway through a contract. Stay-put holidays were mostly the choice of lower ranking men with families in Awali. Married men without their families usually flew home. Bachelors and single women in the main preferred the fleshpots or romantic scenes, which included Kashmir, Beirut and Cyprus. The company granted £75 for fares.

Leisure trips among Arabs were not commonplace, though the mercantile class were getting used to the idea of travel once, even several times, a year to places like Baghdad or Beirut. It was business, they were wont to explain, and while no doubt they did place orders and sign contracts, not all were immune to the dissolute charms denied them in Bahrain.

Travel opportunities for labouring Arabs were limited, unless they went to the mainland for better paid jobs. But pay increases, promotion and Bapco management's agreement, under pressure, to let local workers "save up" holidays provided initiatives.

Mohammed Ali, one of our office men who had progressed to European staff status, decided to take a whole month off to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, an obligation ranked with daily prayers, keeping the fast at Ramadhan and giving alms to the poor.

The pilgrimages - to Mecca in Saudi Arabia or to Kerbala and other Shia shrines in Iraq - caused concern in Bahrain, a sea and air staging post, when hundreds of penniless homebound foreign Muslims were dumped on landing stages without sustenance or shelter for weeks.

The holy cities of Mecca and Medina were a tourist gold mine, Ibn Saud found on conquering them, and income from the Haj kept his kingdom solvent before the advent of oil. Our Mohammed Ali survived his first pilgrimage but found it was a gigantic rip off. When his aircraft from Bahrain landed at Jeddah, he discovered police and customs men refusing permits to travellers without a backhand. He stayed in Medina for 14 days, then went to Mecca and the Great Mosque, where 315,000 pilgrims had prayed in one

month. He followed the rituals, seven times round the Ka'ba (the black stone), then marching seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa, on which Adam and Eve reputedly stood, where a woman searching for water went seven times between the hills until Abraham appeared, smiled and rubbed his foot in the sand and water emerged.

Water was important for parched, bare headed pilgrims. Hundreds died from heat stroke, said Mohammed, though in the fearful heat of 1951 thousands died. Water cost three annas for four gallons in the towns but he had to pay 12 times as much for a can in Muna, outside Mecca. Buses were the only transport. There were vast fleets of them and they were not cheap. They were run by one company, whose bosses happened to include a son of the king.

Mohammed came home - by custom - with presents: new clothes for his family and three sheep, peaches and lime juice for the pleasure of any who might visit on his return. He was wiser but poorer; though he would henceforth be known as Hajji Mohammed.

Foremost in Bahrain's sporting calendar were race days. While the axiom, "There's no such thing as a racing certainty," held good at Manama meetings, certain factors could be guaranteed, such as fine weather and firm, rock hard going. In the absence of form books and tipsters, the shrewd punter put his money on the owner, His Highness. Bookies were barred. But there was the Tote, and I knew that was straight because I helped to run it.

Smith, my superior, told me I had volunteered for race duties on my first rest day along with a number of office colleagues. Arab and Indian clerks from Accounts also worked at the Tote windows, but they were paid volunteers. Never mind, the spring and autumn meetings supported a good cause, a sanatorium in India for Bahraini TB patients.

A rough patch of ground, railed to form a circuit, attracted thousands of locals and foreigners by bus or bicycle or on foot. When bulbous vintage Rolls Royce limousines arrived, curtains were drawn back and doors opened to disgorge black-shrouded women and their small daughters in amazing numbers, a purdah detachment on wheels temporarily liberated by the ruling shaikhs (who sat in the grandstand). Tiny girls in brocaded Arab costume

squatted on the dusty earth selling sticky cakes and sweets and lemonade, while the municipal water cart dispensed refreshment by the bucket.

Modest in scale, race meetings were treated earnestly. Leading Brits from the government and Bapco, with a shaikh or two, strutted about purposefully with armbands to prove they were starters, judges, stewards and Clerk of Course. There was a saddling enclosure (though the Arab jockeys spurned saddles) and proper procedures were pursued. The police band struck up the Bahraini anthem as Shaikh Sulman arrived in state and when he and his entourage were seated in the makeshift royal box the eight horses competing in the six-furlong Muharraq Plate were led to the start. A bugler sounded the Off and they were away.

The political resident's daughter, Mary Hay, not the lightest of riders, had a mount in the first race, but while her white topee showed well to the fore over much of the distance, she couldn't whip like the Arab jockeys and she finished fourth. A brazen hussy she must have seemed to the Khalifa women in their Victorian widow's weeds, huddled on the rails at a far point from their menfolk. Four or five young women from diplomatic or oil circles raced at these meetings but never won.

To be sure of a winner, one had to back the ruler's mares and stallions. At the autumn meeting for which I "volunteered," His Highness took the first two places in the first race with his bay mare Hamdania (Tote paid 20 rupees for a 2-rupee stake) and black mare Krush II. But two other horses were unplaced.

In the second heat, his mares took the first three places, while four others were unplaced. The third race was for police horses only, and a police colt won the fourth. Of the eight runners in The Open Plate, seven were owned by the ruler and the eighth by a relative. Finally, the Bahrain Derby brought victory for a chestnut mare from the ruler's stable. In summary, of 48 horses racing, 26 belonged to Sulman and 16 were police horses (which came to the same thing). He owned most of the winners...and most of the losers. At least he collected the prize money, about £150 in all.

The races were clearly a British innovation, bearing Belgrave's imprimatur. The Empire was dying but one had to pretend not to

notice and to keep up appearances. The Brits, diplomatic and military, were rather good at that. A patch of scrubland on Muharraq island, a British Government purchase for a strategic base, was turned into an Air Force oasis, complete with English landscaping, green lawns, flowers, fountains and fairy lights. At one evening garden party, more than 200 Awali guests enjoyed light and martial music played by a visiting RAF orchestra and danced in the officers' and sergeants' messes. It was rather jolly.

Between times, bridge and hockey players (even common footballers) flew between Muharraq and Kuwait and Iraq to play other RAF bases and oil company teams.

The British political residency at Jufair, the naval base near Manama, was the Mecca for diplomatic entertaining and receiving important people passing through: statesmen, military brasshats, and the Duchess of Kent who stopped overnight and inspected the police guard. The resident's daughter revelled in matters social and, as Our Manama Correspondent, kept Bahrain Islander readers abreast of the really important events in the capital.

Typical was At Home on King George's Birthday when 300 Britishers were guests of Sir Rupert and Lady Hay, and after the police band played God Save The King everyone swept off to the Gymkhana Club for a Ball and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Intellectually, Bahrain appeared as a stagnant backwater. When Bill Mawdsley called Bapco managers Philistines, he might have added that all of us were such most of the time and most of us were all of the time. Ours was a cultural desert, said expatriates with Iranian experience.

Talents and secondary skills were not to be denied. Some people were arty; some theatrical. There were outlets for imagination; and sport for the competitive. But the inquisitive or disputatious found opportunities wanting. Only as my time expired did a new group, a Christian fellowship, announce its formation and a plan to debate the abolition of capital punishment. The 1950 census revealed a population of 109,650, composed of 91,179 Bahrainis, 6,934 Persians, 3,043 Indians, Pakistanis and Goanese, 2,526 Saudi Arabs, 2,466 Omanis and Muscatis, 2,208 Europeans and Americans and 1,264 other aliens. Enough of a melange there, of

languages, customs and religious and other practices, to excite curiosity. Other than in a very general sense, the lives of the people were never reported upon. Indian families, for instance, were a growing community, running their own educational, religious and social institutions, the men mainly engaged in retailing or working for Bapco or the Government, yet to others they were almost anonymous. In the absence of local news media, most of Awali's residents in their straitjacketed isolation had the barest knowledge of life and culture outside.

Time, of course, was against us, what with the 48-hour working week, the march to the mess hall at meal times, a few chores and diversions. Answering the search for stimulus, alcohol activated the tongue but often to no intelligent purpose. Mind testing conversation was at a premium. But some laboured in their leisure to create fine things though the likelihood of anyone exercising his talents in the bunkhouse was remote. An exhibition of arts and crafts in Awali attracted some 200 entries of commendable, even excellent, quality. Originality and attention to detail were evident in the needlework done by both sexes, embracing petit point, crochet, embroidery and tapestry. Scale models of ships and a stagecoach and a wide range of photographic studies vied for appreciation with 80 examples of artwork, land and sea subjects in water colours and oil, ink sketches and charcoal portraits.

The cultural apex of oil life was the repertory company, ARTS, whose productions were occasional, according to circumstances. Since the burning down of the cinema-theatre, productions had to be staged outdoors. While the prospect of rain stopping play was remote, sudden gusting winds were ever a threat. And hot, humid nights could make even the most attentive audience fidgety, to the discomfort of the actors. But live theatre was an attraction some hundreds took to with a sense of occasion and anticipation of pleasure. If the cast's talents were uneven, one could normally expect respectable performances from two or three principals. Mary Swift from Accounts, another of the Islander poets, was brilliantly melodramatic and her piercing screams from the stage, echoing across the black desert wastes, must have struck terror into the hearts of any distant nomads. Histrionics allied to skilful direction

and a suitable choice of play (for example, *The Shop at Sly Corner*, *An Inspector Calls*, *Saloon Bar* and *Why Not Tonight?*) meant that patrons could usually depart feeling they had had their couple of rupees' worth and would come again.

I had a minor role, as critic, and my reviews, such as they were, could have had no effect on the box office because they appeared after a three-night run. Then once, I decided to publish a review before the last night, and that required my attending the opening.

First nights are not always the best nights, for cast and critic. They can be like bad dress rehearsals, where cues are missed, lines fluffed, and doors refuse to open. And on this night, there were blemishes which I saw and felt it my honest duty to report. Perhaps I should have been more careful, a shade generous even. I ought to have taken cognisance that these were not just anonymous Thespians who pass in the night, but men and women going into their offices and workshops the morning after to receive raspberries from their workmates on the basis of the *Bahrain Islander's* malevolent write up. It was a novel experience for everyone. The actors and stagehands were incensed. Along with reminders that "we are only amateurs," they protested to me and to the general manager, who sent a sharp memo demanding to know what I was playing at.

As a goodwill gesture, I told the theatre company to write their own reviews in future and send them in for publication. Just once they did that and realised how awkward it was for an insider to be objective. I was reinstated as critic, but relationships were never quite the same. They could not be sure whether my praise was earned or awarded simply to keep the peace.

Amateur drama was a thread which ran through every community. The Raj in Manama had a couple of productions a year from MADS and the Arab, Persian and Indian clubs staged shows. The Islamic clubs being all male, female parts had to be faked. Goa, the former Portuguese colony in India, provided Bapco with clerks, waiters and chefs. Some of these belonged to the Goanese theatrical company, at whose invitation I attended a performance in Manama. Eight actors worked hard, very hard, as did the four-piece band who played mainly western or Latin-flavoured music. The cast was all male,

several portraying women, a feat not difficult for delicately featured men.

I was probably the only non-Roman Catholic in the audience of 200 or more, and the only Briton apart from a priest, who got restless at one point and said he was "slipping away for an hour"! The show started at 9.30 and while I understood nothing of the story and the language, I was impressed by the enthusiasm of the players. I enjoyed it up to a point, the point being that sitting on a hard chair in a roofless building without so much as a fan to stir the sultry air for almost five and a half hours was pretty tough going. It was past 3.30 when I got home to bed.

You had to hand it to the Catholics. With a little encouragement from their priests, they knew how to enjoy themselves and they seemed to be genuinely cosmopolitan. One afternoon I was invited and taken to a spot outside Manama that I did not recognise, though one patch of scrubland was much like another, to experience some jollity. There were lots of Asian men, women and children making merry with music and dancing and games. As ever, the priest was present and if he was not actually in charge of the bar he was certainly helping by willing his flock to spend their hard earned rupees on a drop of the hard stuff.

Everybody celebrated the end of Ramadhan, with its extra days off. A couple of Irish lads suggested a trip to Manama, to the social and dance organised by the Catholic Ladies' Hockey Club. Whether such an outfit existed I doubted, but the event was real enough. When we arrived at 11 o'clock the dance was two hours old, and the air muggy as our taxi dropped us outside the Catholic Recreation Centre, formerly the British Overseas Airways guest house. Several moments of knocking succeeded in attracting attention and a little priest wearing regulation cloak and beard took our three rupees apiece and ushered us through the door.

It was an occasion for much merriment for Indians, Anglo-Indians and Iraqi Jews with a sprinkling of British and Americans. Children excepted, everybody seemed to be knocking back beer and whisky (which at a rupee a nip was a fourfold increase on Awali prices). I managed to have a dance with a sari clad Indian woman and then an English woman, which was more than my customary lot in

Awali. I also did my cabaret spot, after which an Iraqi Jew whose store I frequently patronised pleaded with me to sell him my castanets. The courtyard enclosed by lofty walls was absurdly small as a dance hall for the dense gathering. Humidity and the dancing induced perspiring of the freest kind and questioned the sanity of people who will endure any suffering in the name of pleasure.

Awali had a lending library and a reading minority. An oil worker's wife, Mrs Forster, had been employed there for 14 years in charge of some 7,000 books which were increased by about 100 a month and borrowed at the rate of 300 a day. In the early days, she said, hard-bitten construction men were avid readers of travel books, or books on gems for a lot of men had picked up precious stones in various parts of the world. Now detective novels were by far favourite reading, followed by Westerns, romance (especially among women) and travel. Sport and war memoirs were non-fiction preferences.

Manama also had a public library in the education department offices. It had more books, 11,000 - English easily outnumbering Arabic - but fewer borrowers. The Bahraini ex-teacher librarian said it had been going since the early 1930s and was used by Arabs, Indians and Europeans. Most magazines and encyclopaedias were in English. Air mail editions of *The Economist* graced the reading room but appeared to be untouched.

Literature sadly lacking was any sort of local guide book until in 1953 James Belgrave published *Welcome to Bahrain* "a complete illustrated guide for tourists and travellers."

Leisure services in Awali were way ahead of those outside. For many in towns and villages, recreation meant sitting in or outside a cheerless, ill lit coffee shop, smoking a pipe, gossiping or playing a board game. Bapco gave modest financial support to a number of clubs in the towns for Indians, Pakistanis, Arabs and Persians. The Persians had the Golistan and Ferdousi; the Arabs the Ahli, Arubah, Bahrain, Al Islah, Nahdhah and others. The Raj in Manama had the Gymkhana, a club viewed with some jealousy because it had what the Islamic clubs lacked, especially women members and alcohol. The ruler was keen on clubs for Bahraini young men and gave them land and money. They were, according to the adviser, "an important

focus in the life of educated young Arabs...meetings of the intelligentsia with a strong political flavour." My impression was of places for vapid discussion to stifle political initiatives.

One of the better appointed clubs, The Bahrain on Muharraq Island, had modern buildings, a large games hall, a small library, a reading room and soft drink store, and an office for secretary Ali Sayyar. The whole premises had been offered as the first of 41 prizes in a raffle (Tickets 10 rupees) to help pay for new buildings on a bigger site. Its 1937 founding membership of 30 government and Bapco employees had grown to 280. It was the island's leisure centre, promoting Muharraq Football Club and providing volleyball, table tennis and darts, as well as offering chess, housey housey, occasional films shows and debates with other clubs. Historical dramas and boxing bouts won big donations from wealthy patrons.

Al Islah was tucked away in a gloomy back street, a large upstairs rented room reached by a ragged stone stairway. It had fewer electric lights and fans than Al Bahrain but the narrow main room with comfortable chairs along its walls made for an intimate atmosphere. It was designed for the sedentary leisure of its 150 members, including oil workers, government clerks, a few merchants and some teachers, who elected Hassan Ali Abull president and Salman Hassan Satir secretary. Members listened to the radio, read and talked and had debates and lectures. One, Abdul Rahman al Ma-Awdah, a teacher, won prizes in London and elsewhere for recitation and the club presented an historic verse play from his pen.

The Nahdha in Hedd, with 50 members, was a poor relation and a long way from the luxury of electricity. Two roughly constructed windowless rooms on a flat roof were for literary exercise or table tennis. Around a trestle table on the roof, men sat listlessly, enveloped by dank humidity, while insects buzzed around a hot, glaring naptha lamp. Pretty dismal, Mohammed Rafi al Mahmood, an official, agreed, but improvements were in prospect. His Highness had presented them with a plot of land; all they needed now were a few wealthy patrons to finance construction.

Facility in English was not the key to everyday knowledge and I was disappointed in gleaning so little from the politically flavoured

intelligentsia. If the ruler was sensitive about political agitation in his domain, he had nothing to fear from the clubs. Trying to start a discussion, I chose a taboo subject, women. Would it not liven things up if the clubs let women in, or if women were allowed to have their own clubs? Nobody was prepared to assent or give a direct answer. A merchant said he would be horrified if his daughter appeared in the street unveiled, another was not opposed to girls leaving school at ten years, and a young man dismissed my questions as matters not covered by the Koran.

Clubs in Manama had the usual pattern of activities, open nightly till nearly midnight for members over 16 or 18 years, but they also sent out members to the villages to do welfare work. Big things were in the offing: a contract for a new Arubah Club, worth over 90,000 rupees, had been signed.

At much greater expense, a new Ahli in Daley Road was about to open. Its uncommon design made it distinctive, a portico with white columns dominating, and inside a large stage erected in the main hall from which opened six rooms. Easy chairs, chandelier clusters of lights, a refreshment room and games facilities were available for a membership of up to 350. It was hoped it would become the first multiracial club.

The most popular places of resort were the public cinemas, five in Manama and one in Muharraq. Nowhere else in the Gulf were they permitted. Belgrave had no qualms about attending Awali's open air free cinema, making occasional visits to see Hollywood epics as a sophisticate without fear of corruption, but was distressed by films shown in Manama - probably Hindi productions with their emphasis on dramatic events such as suttee, where a widow perishes on her husband's funeral pyre. Films had a bad effect on a comparatively primitive people, in Bahrain causing deterioration in manners and morals, even to women committing suicide by pouring petrol over their clothes and setting them alight, he said.

There were other spectacles in Bahrain which were not for the squeamish but they came within Islamic tradition and Belgrave was happy to observe them from a seat of honour.

To the innocent bystander, there's not a lot to choose between Islam, Christianity and Judaeism, springing as they do from a

common heritage. Precept and practice sit uneasily together. Without too much heartsearching, the ritual sacrifice of a single lamb and the slaughter of millions in war may equally be sanctified. I did not inquire whether the slitting of a lamb's throat on the steps when the shaikh opened the Eastern Bank's new offices had religious significance, nor when blood was spilled at the stone laying of the schoolboys' hostel. I understood that good luck was intended.

Islam recognises Jesus Christ as a prophet, but not as a god figure in a trinity. "There is no god but God," Muslims declare at prayers five times a day. One god, Allah, but reached by different paths. Schism produced the Shia and Sunni traditions, as it did Catholics and Protestants, orthodox and heretics.

In Bahrain, with a numerically equal balance of shia and sunni, allowing for divisions into sub-sects, the sunnis were regarded as the haves, led by the Khalifa family, and the shias the rural have nots. The shias could, perhaps, have claimed an affinity with Catholics in Northern Ireland - an underclass, denied equal opportunities by the governing sect and particularly discriminated against in employment. While the shia, largely of Persian origin, were undoubtedly poorer as a class - they inhabited the primitive villages - they also included a large proportion of the wealthy merchant families in Manama and Muharraq. Yet sunni Bahrainis claimed that illegal immigrants from Iran came to the oilfields to steal local men's jobs. Civil commotion and fatal disorders were usually blamed on the shia.

The split in Islam came not many years after the prophet Mohammed's death in 632 AD. The succession as caliph passed to three of Mohammed's lieutenants, considered as sunni, and then to his son in law, Ali, believed by his shia followers to be the prophet's rightful heir. Ali was assassinated and his younger son, Hussain, took his family and a band of followers from Medina to Kufa in Iraq where he was promised support in a bid to succeed his father. The promise, however, was a trick and on the way the travellers, men, women and children, were set upon at Kerbala and slaughtered. Annually in Bahrain - as in few other parts of the Muslim world - this act of treachery was remembered by a spectacle too serious to be

called a carnival but certainly a remarkable piece of street ballet on the tenth day of the month of Muharram.

The Islamic lunar-calendar year is roughly 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar, and it follows that with the passage of years a fixed date moves from summer to winter. In the month of Ramadhan, when food and drink are forbidden throughout daylight hours, abstinence comes hardest when it occurs in the longer and hotter days of summer. Tempers sometimes frayed in Bahrain and domestic disputes ended up in court.

Day long denial is testing. I was in Marrakesh, Morocco, during one Ramadhan. In the streets off the market square, open vats of soup and stew simmered all afternoon and bakers sweated over their ovens turning out pies and pastries by the hundred. Queues formed as the blood red sun sank. The boom of a cannon announced nightfall and the crowds in the streets hastened to light cigarettes, snatched at bakers' wares and thrust out mugs for soup. Let gluttony commence!

The length and breadth of Islam witnessed similar scenes, penance on a heroic scale. The trouble was making up for lost time during the night, with fleshly delights in profusion, staying out late and filling the air with throbbing music. Butchers did record trade during this month, helped by the drummers who went round the streets waking the faithful and warning that dawn approached and time for carnal or carnivorous indulgence was short.

Ramadhan 1370 began on June 6th 1951, a sweltering day. Arab and Persian labourers pouring from the huge Bapco buses to start the day's work were unusually subdued. Unnecessary movement had to be curbed, every ounce of energy saved on a day when even one drop of moistening water was forbidden. At appointed times, the little office messengers listlessly unrolled their mats in the odd corners where they said prayers, and, while the sahibs were out at lunch, took a nap stretched out on floors or desktops. It was gruelling for workers in the refinery or the desert, doing jobs for which ancient rituals were not designed. No sympathy they earned from some Europeans: serves them right for excesses of the night! But one Englishman at breakfast in the dining hall wrapped two boiled eggs and toast in a napkin. "For the houseboy," he explained.

Everyone benefited at the end of Ramadhan by the feast, *Id al Fitr*, which meant two days off for Bapco workers, three if it fell with Friday and the longest break in the calendar.

The tenth day of Muharram, the Ashoora, the shia pageant in memory of the martyred Hussain, was scorned by sunnis who said the ceremony was maudlin and gory and "ignorant," and gave foreigners the impression that all Muslims were primitive.

At the start of the month, holy men from sacred sites in Iraq and Iran gathered the flock in shia quarters in matams, religious houses, there to tell and retell the story of Hussain and his followers. Parts in the passion play were assigned to men and boys and horses, crude hearses were built and pathetic representations of corpses laid out. The scene was meant to convey carnage and everywhere was evidence of blood. Each night processions formed up for practice.

The tenth day was a holiday and a notice from Bapco management hinted that Europeans might not be welcomed on the processional route and carrying a camera was perilous. It was superfluous advice to the vast majority in Awali who had no intention of acquainting themselves with alien culture.

We went, two office colleagues and I, by taxi on a hot Friday morning to Manama, where one normally found the dingy coffee houses buzzing with noisy chatter and radios blaring repetitive Arab songs and music, the market lanes thronged with dawdling bargain hunters or side streets choked by a black herd of bleating, stinking goats. Not on this October morning, however. Manama was a ghost town of silent streets, shuttered coffee houses and shops, apparently deserted shacks and barastis. Where were all the sunni thousands who were supposed to regard this day's events with such disdain? Either they had gone to ground or, more likely, gone to watch the procession.

We picked up an Indian workmate who was to guide our car to his home. In a maze of narrow streets, we soon became entangled with a procession, flagellants in front and a gang of chest beaters bearing down on our rear. We left our driver to carve an escape down an alley packed with spectators and on foot found our refuge, a high mud walled tenement overlooking a small paved square. A band

played, chains jingled and screams and shouts rent the air. The heat was oppressive.

Admittance to our arranged house was completed furtively, and the door swiftly bolted behind us. We were led to the roof to join a small party of Indian clerks, wives and children. We numbered three Brits on this occasion, unlike another when I shared a vantage point with the oil company's marine superintendent, Capt Petersen, at the home of Bapco's meat buyer, Thomas Simon, a Christian Arab, while the next rooftop accommodated Mary Hay and several English friends, and a platform on a lorry in the square below held Belgrave, his son and a police inspector. So much for unwelcome infidels!

Perched on a stone parapet, I had a magnificent view. On flat rooftops all around swarmed black-clad women with young offspring. On the roof of a mosque sat a woman whose uncovered face was black as coal and she clasped a tiny child with light skin and flaming red hair. Below, women crouched on doorsteps or squeezed into a tight mass at the sides of the square, all in black and hastily covering their faces - those without masks - when perceiving Europeans were about. Headed by a massive officer with a pistol at his hip, five native policemen, nursing long staves, added a touch of colour with their khaki drill uniforms and red turbans.

The pageant was a series of similar processions representing various districts or mosques. A column led by bearers of flags and identifying banners became a motley throng encircling a band of throbbing drums and tinkling tiny cymbals. Above the din of one troop rose the sweet tones of a holy man in black robes and green turban, singing powerfully yet effortlessly. As he passed, the women bystanders sent up a high pitched wail which trembled in the air then vanished. A horse passed by, a noble grey draped with a bloodstained sheet, then another horse, its rider crowned with a green turban pierced by a wooden sword. It was all symbolic and the blood which appeared as large blots and splashes on costumes and winding sheets was only crimson dye or at worst goats' blood.

The chain beaters were most impressive: two lines of men, up to a hundred in each, barefoot and dressed in black - tunic, shorts and puttees - the tunic inscribed in front and fashioned with a rear flap which dropped to expose bare shoulder blades. Each flagellant held

a small bunch of fine chain and, as a short step was taken and the trunk swayed first left then right, the chain was swung over one shoulder and then the other to brush the back.

The sheer grace and rhythmic precision were uncanny. These, be it noted, were pearl divers, fishermen and labourers. There was no music to set the tempo beyond the swish of the light chains. At intervals, a figure clad as the rest darted between the files, clashing finger cymbals and crying, "Hussain! Hussain! Hussain!" The beaters responded, chanting "Hussain! Hussain!" while the women wailed and wept.

Young men of fine build led some chain groups which tapered little by little until the last beaters were infant boys, clearly fatigued in the intense heat and lacking the rhythm of their elders. One tiny child, rattling his chains in front of him, ran a hand through a mop of black curly hair, looking as though he wished desperately to crawl away into the shade and have a good cry.

As the delicate scourging slowly departed the arena, the breast beaters arrived in teams of about 30, muscular men stripped to the waist and forming two facing lines. Spurred on by their leader into voicing a swelling chant, they thumped their chests in unison. Then closing ranks, and bending as for a rugby scrum, they continued beating themselves, finally leaping with outstretched arms and a yell.

I left my roof perch and went into the house to take photographs of the passing show. Hovering nervously, our Indian hosts begged us to be careful, to make sure we were not visible from outside. They would have preferred us to obey the rule, cameras taboo. It was difficult focusing through a restrictive aperture, a small window barred and half shuttered. I got fragmented pictures, in one a legless leper propelling his body on a mat beside the marchers.

Thus far the spectacle had entertained but what was to come was not for the squeamish. We had heard about the swordsmen, how they slashed themselves, could go berserk in the heat, even die! They were nearly a hundred yards off when first observed: about 40 of them, each wearing a white smock, crimson stained. "Goat's blood," exclaimed one of my companions. Some skulls were cut in two or three places, and blood gleaming in the powerful sunlight

trickled down cheeks. One man went around dabbing foreheads, sticking cotton wool on wounds, bandaging, but as fast as a dressing was applied it became saturated.

Slowly the bloodied band approached the square. With each step, a clamour of passionate cries swelled faster and louder, a hundred women set up an awesome warbling, others shrieked and wept and screamed the names of those who died with Hussain. The handful of policemen gripped their long batons, ready to rush and clear the watchers from the square. For a fearful moment, I thought panic would break out, but the din was greater than the danger. The swordsmen formed a square. All but one or two were bleeding, yet they remained erect, swords stiffly upright. Their leader did a tour of inspection and discovered a follower with a clean brow. He drew close, raised his sword and with a quick jerk of the wrist struck home with the blade close to the hilt. The victim did not flinch, just stood stock still and waited for the blood to trickle from his shaven head into his eyes and down his nose. Then the grisly gang moved off.

Nauseated, I sat down for a while, head between knees, telling our Indian friends that the sun was proving too much for me! At the end came the funeral cortege: a canopied hearse, barely large enough to hold an infant's body, and borne immediately behind an outstretched human frame covered with a purple-stained sheet.

The mosque near our grandstand was a busy thoroughfare. When a procession terminated in the square, the participants trooped into the mosque, emerging later to join another parade. The great drama, which might have been set on a revolving stage, crawled through its many acts. Yet when the curtain fell, just after noon, the stage cleared as if by magic. Men poured from the mosque. Women's black cloaks opened like huge wings, then closed, shaking off the dust. Men, women and children mingled and all surged along the processional way, disappearing round a bend in the road. Every rooftop cleared and I looked down on the abandoned square. They had buried their honoured dead in sunscorched streets and squares for another year and now lonely silence prevailed.

One last rite remained: the torchlight procession at night to search for the severed head of Hussain.

6 Jamboree capers

THE WEATHER was agreeably warm when I landed in March. A couple of sharp downpours in the first week, supposedly uncharacteristic, flooded the Bapco offices and made the desert bloom. There was no more rain for many months.

In April the air was hot and sticky and one late afternoon a dust storm lashed out, throwing a veil over the sun and sweeping through my closed window and its fine mesh cover and coating all within. From then on temperatures rose inexorably. And heaven forbid that the temperature should fall, for its corollary was soaring humidity. On a day that shade temperature reached 116 and humidity was 20 per cent, the night recording was 86 degrees and 94 per cent. In such humidity, a fresh shirt became saturated in ten minutes, matches left on a club terrace table refused to ignite on a sodden box and a two-inch pool stopped play on the tennis courts.

It was hard to say which was worse, the heat or the humidity. Odd how people who could have moved to temperate climes chose to live here for years and years. Apart from inducing lethargy and apathy, might not the sun have softened the brain? Clerks in air conditioned offices perspired freely. In the refinery, near steam pipes, in welding shops, on tanker wharves where the flat sea radiated heat, working must have been hell. On a rest day, a swim on the company's private beach at Zellaq was tempting, but the sand was sometimes too hot for bare feet and the shallow sea, sink proof in its salinity, too hot for comfort.

The weather played tricks, the winds and the humidity. The shamaals from the north, cool or chill depending on the season, could be vicious, rattling doors and windows and moaning through hedges. Wind-whipped sand and dust could rise like a curtain, obliterating sun and cloudless blue sky, turning day into night. Out of doors, raging sand stung the face, clogged the eyes, matted the hair and penetrated clothing and boots. Then just as suddenly, the

blow would cease, the veil of sand drop like a stone and all once more appear serene. Then the sweepers came out with handcarts and shovelled up the sand heaped against walls and buildings and trundled it away to scatter in the desert.

At 7.30 on a July morning, clouds of fog hung about Awali and over the desert, and ground visibility was scarcely a hundred yards. It was not really fog, but humidity, solid blankets of grey steam. At this hour during late summer months, the hollow between the villages of East and West Rafaa, outside Awali, filled with humid mist and the ruler's snow white turreted palace-fort appeared to float like a castle in the clouds or a ghost ship on a sea of foam.

Bahrain had a two-season climate, a time for coming and a time for going. "Directors' weather," at its best in January, brought an invasion of board members and vice-presidents from snowbound Manhattan, British politicians, military brasshats and anyone who could wangle an air ticket. At the other extreme, hot and humid June was when Bapco's first team - general manager, chief accountant and head of personnel in particular - went on leave or special assignment. Smith, the accountant, crept away without saying a word. Brown, general manager, on the other hand, told his cronies he was off and left a few instructions.

The managerial second string picked up the reins. Ebenezer McGregor, a slight, balding, waspish tongued Scot, became my boss as acting chief accountant and overseer of the Bahrain Islander. He said bluntly that he agreed with Brown that my writing was too flowery. My editorials were considered pretty poor, and the last one led the general manager to say, "I wouldn't like New York to think I passed that stuff for publication."

Warming to his task, McGregor added, "He said if you can't find something in Awali worth writing about, then keep off the front page. He also complained about indecent jokes being printed."

I wondered if McGregor had been through Job Relations Training, where you were supposed to pat the man on the back, not kick him in the groin. So far I had received more kicks than ha'pence from the management. But they never took me to one side for a discussion. They didn't like my vague outpourings on abstruse subjects. As dancing was a popular pastime at the club, I pursued

the dance from primitive times, showing how it propitiated the gods, induced rain, encouraged the harvest, helped lovers and so on.

Brown was not impressed. He consulted back numbers of the *Islander* and, said McGregor, picked out an editorial classic, before my time, a piece on building plans for a future Awali.

"All right," I said, "let me go out to the refinery, the wharves, drilling rigs and other places. There must be lots of human interest stories I can come back with."

McGregor said that was out of the question. "Your place is here, in the office."

I pointed out the difficulty of filling the paper now that summer had closed down outdoor pursuits, the sport and leisure events and state ceremonies. Why couldn't we carry hard news from the UK and the States as did the Kuwaiti and Saudi oil papers? We filled up with stolen goods: the *Telegraph* crosswords, quotes from *Reader's Digest* and jokes from trade magazines designed to be read by oilmen. It wasn't my fault if some of the jokes were racy. Why didn't the management censor those? They vetted everything else.

Brown, American, even killed a brief reference I made to American Independence Day which fell on our publication day. Yet the Kuwaiti did a nice piece on it, historic significance and all that. What was Brownie scared of...the natives in Manama starting a war for liberation?

"I know it's disheartening," said McGregor. "You must do your best."

Regular readers of the *Bahrain Islander* in far flung company offices and family homes would have been aware that Awali was a happy place and spared the sordid or tragic happenings of the world outside. Minor dramas or poignant events happened from time to time but not for publication.

There was the harrowing case of Household Effects Damaged in Transit. Accounting duties took me to a house to make an inventory of damage for insurance purposes. Never had I seen such carnage in a tea chest, in a whole series of tea chests. An Australian wife, expecting her fourth child, had recently arrived to join her husband, an engineer. When her furnishings came, she opened the chests and

wept. Her tears were scarcely dry when I called next morning. "Look at this, and this, and this..." she said, plaintively.

She said a reputable firm had packed her things in Australia. It was unbelievable. When you use newspapers to wrap china and glass, you crush reams to make cushions. Her countless bits and pieces were wrapped in single sheets of uncreased newsprint. The result? Boxes of broken china and glassware, picture frames smashed, books sliced, silverware dented: vandalism on a grand scale. To crown it all, a quart bottle of Swan ink, blue-black, had been packed in the heart of a chestful of linen. Its cap was intact, but the ink had seeped out and flowed and flowed, soaked up by shirts, a bed spread and table cloths, all irrevocably ruined. Such folly must surely have been planned!

Better luck followed when a second consignment of effects arrived intact. Misfortune did me a good turn. The Aussies were an engaging family and on a number of occasions they invited me to small parties for meals, quiet affairs, no singing or dancing, but anecdotal chat which let hours slip by unnoticed. The wife baked excellent bread, a staple normally eschewed in the dining hall or commissary on account of its stale, sour qualities. It was difficult repaying hospitality on this scale, but the Australian couple welcomed the occasional break I gave them by baby sitting.

Among domestic services, the Bapco hospital had a maternity record to be proud of. "Don't worry," I said to a young chap in Accounts who was a bundle of nerves as his wife expected their first child. He had scarcely slept for three nights and could not keep food and drink down, while his wife was disturbed by the activity of the unborn child. When she was admitted to hospital, he visited her frequently - it was no distance - and between times he sat by the phone in my office. Each time it rang, he jumped.

Later that night, mulling over the day's events, it struck me that the numerous deliveries made since my arrival had all been live. What a terrible thing if after all our joking, choosing of names, an announcement in the Islander and a reminder that I wanted a cigar (it was custom for new fathers to distribute a box), what if the baby was stillborn? In fact, some hours earlier the infant had been

delivered but did not live. So far as I had been able to gather, of births running into hundreds, this was only the second tragedy.

The husband's disappointment was keen. His wife suffered shock and doctors moved her into a room distant from the crying of another baby. More needed to be done, the husband thought, such as getting rid of the newly purchased pram. Alas, tactless people were still around. One woman, of a late age for having another child, defied doctor's orders and called on the sorrowing young wife to dwell on the birth of her own baby a few days earlier and on the special treatment she had been given since.

More pain came when a local orderly observed, "There's only one baby in the ward and there should be two." Enlightened, he expressed his regret and added that the baby was safe in the arms of Allah.

A doctor advised the young woman to go home with her husband to Scotland, to her own people, away from the many young mothers in Awali. The management did not agree: a short rest in somewhere like Kashmir should be adequate. However, the couple did go home. They lent their car - a not unusual practice - to a pair of men in the bunkhouse, who wrecked it a day or two before the owners returned. In the small hours, the car left the road at a remarkable angle and crashed into a tree outside the offices. The steering wheel pinned the driver to his seat; his passenger went through the windscreen. Their injuries were not excessive.

Awali possessed relatively few cars, rather more unlicensed, unskilled drivers, it seemed. The drunks were a menace. One maniac who got blotto every Thursday night had three smashes and still kept his job. Strangely, serious injuries were rare.

Awali folk went to unusual lengths in 1951 to get the Jamboree Scout Patrol airborne. The world scouting jamboree that summer took place in Austria and Italy. Awali scouts applied for a place but were rejected as too young. They persisted and the authorities allowed them to attend in Austria as observers and appear in Rome with the possibility of joining some tableau or other.

The patrol of ten emerged after all the scouts were given a number of points which were gradually reduced according to schoolwork, scout parades and so on. Then came the question of expense: some

£200 a head for air travel, camping and incidentals. Fathers, long serving Bapco employees, were not exactly hard up but they decided they could not or would not stump up for their sons. So, 'the community' decided to raise the money, a £1,600 target. Handsome sums came in from a comprehensive programme of events: Rupee-a-Job, hairdressing, a Derby sweep, housey housey, a swimming gala and fete and a boxing tournament. A casino on the club terrace netted £300, allowing for a deficit on the roulette wheel.

The highlight was the concert. It was proper that Fred Corness, a Geordie refinery operator, should be impresario because his boy, young Freddie, was the jamboree patrol leader. There was no shortage of talent. The only problem was getting artistes to turn up for rehearsals. At one, only two of us appeared. I was to do my Spanish song and dance with castanets, a comic turn I had done for many years in many places, including a table top in the planters' club in Darjeeling on VE Day, when the members filled white enamelled pails with gin and lime juice for us sailors on leave.

Now, at rehearsal, an accordion player and I quickly ran through The Spaniard Who Blighted My Life and pronounced ourselves satisfied. Alas, the very next day my accompanist got fired.

It was, however, all right on the night. The club was packed. Apart from the curtain sticking so that everybody out front could see the chaos backstage, things went according to plan. There were musicians and soloists galore. Producer Corness's wife Molly, a melodious, untrained Tyneside soprano, sang a couple of ballads and their daughter showed some skill as a ballet and tap dancer. Among the slapstick comedy acts, a pair playing inebriates nearly overdid it by coming on drunk. The conjuror was very good, and a young man playing the female in an apache dance rounded off - using a Bapco product - with fire eating. A trio, of which I was one, had the audience howling with laughter as we mimed the Andrews Sisters' recording of Heartbreaker. The general reaction was "Best concert for years. Should be done again." It made a good profit too. And so the jamboree target was reached and passed and the excited boys packed their kit. Sad to say, they were not ten but nine. Poor Freddie Corness, whose family had worked so hard, took sick and was in hospital as the others left at the end of July.

After all the ballyhoo the departure was almost ignored. A few mothers assembled outside the offices to watch the bus go. McGregor sat at his desk as his young son left outside. Mawdsley, head of education, observed: "Thank God it's nearly over." The whole exercise had received too much publicity and played havoc with schooling. He could only hope the boys would get down to some honest classwork when they returned in a few weeks.

But ill luck dogged the youngsters. Torrid Bahrain gave way to torrents in Austria and Italy and the spirit of jamboree faded fast. Miserable, bedraggled, suffering sore throats and coughs, the Awali patrol left their sodden tents and headed for England. At least one treat remained, a stay in London for the Festival of Britain. But their scoutmaster, Bill Jamieson, judged they were in no fit state. They needed rest and recuperation, so he took them straight to Scotland, to a place that happened to enable him to be amongst his ain folk!

Whether kids in Awali got a raw deal, it was hard to say. Their horizons were limited. There was little to stretch them unless it was striving, often successfully, for new records in the swimming pools. Swimming, they put adults to shame.

Theirs was a small, isolated, artificial world, without uncles and aunts and grandparents, with neither the verdant beauty of the countryside nor the bustle and variety of the town. Their formative years suffered from a narrow perspective, when television was yet to come, though an occasional trip to Manama might have heightened their knowledge and experience. In Awali, they knew at least by sight all the women, all the same old faces of hard working, hard drinking and hard swearing men. They knew of the camp's one shop, the company's offices and some workshops, the men Daddy had to "keep in with" and the men "Daddy can give orders to." They knew their air conditioned school well and its half dozen teachers, and they knew by sight the harsh, brown desert all around them.

With parents who were so disposed, and these fortunately were a minority, infants might be taken into the club lounge at Friday lunchtime to romp about in an atmosphere of drink, smoke and small talk, a baby fed drops of gin, a five-year-old encouraged to sup beer. Yet most children, 200 at one stage, attended Sunday school.

Because boys will be boys, there was an element of mischief. Sometimes warnings were advertised: stop smashing windows, stop playing on building sites, stop shooting airguns indiscriminately in the street. They tested Brown's patience at the cinema. However, I never heard of any child being hauled up before any kind of beak and labelled juvenile delinquent. The youngsters were fit and well fed, though lacking inches; possibly a factor in the arrogance which many boys displayed. Academically, there were apparently no high fliers. School terms lasted three months, with a month's holiday between. Work submitted to a children's corner in the Islander from time to time was on the whole uninspiring, and spelling, which teachers might have overseen, was poor.

The young head of the school thought that home life for many youngsters was wanting. They had no respect for property. He said, "Most families use company furniture and if a man falls through a chair he simply phones Maintenance and a man comes down and repairs it. Consequently children adopt that attitude with school fittings and other property in Awali."

Wearing a uniform tends to bring out the best or the worst in people. On a Bapco bus coming back from Manama one evening, a dozen cubs or young scouts stampeded over the seats. Suddenly they turned on one boy and chanted, "Baby, baby, baby!" The victim, close to tears, was bigger than the others, though seemingly of a gentler nature. But after some minutes of taunting, he sprang from his seat and selecting a lad, struck him in the face. A tiny boy, no older than ten, went to intervene and received a punch on the nose for his trouble. Now there were two youngsters howling and a third choking back the tears, while the remainder cheered and demanded a free for all.

A passenger threatened to report the incident to the scoutmaster and I suggested they remember whatever code they professed.

"Wait till you get off the bus," blustered one bully. "Yeah, yeah," chanted the rest. The Awali school was primary and it might have been better if children moved away at 11. But some parents tried to keep them there till 14. To discourage this, the company started giving parents an allowance for boarding schools in the UK, the US or India. Education suffered when a family went home on leave for

three months or more between contracts and children had no schooling during that period.

As in any community, there were parents mindful of their children's interests and behaviour. Others carried on as though indifferent to the effect on their children. Such a woman, whose husband had an important job, was one who openly flirted with several other men of standing. On one occasion when the husband was bringing his three children home from the beach, one child pointed to a passing car and cried, "Look, there's Mummy with her boy friend!"

Seeking pleasure or escape from boredom was the hardest part of life for many women. Paid jobs were rare - very occasionally a vacancy would crop up for a supply teacher, a hospital worker or a part time librarian - and in the main wives had neither the wit nor inclination to do some useful voluntary service. One Christmas passed without a children's party and a nativity play because mothers and teachers could not be bothered. Yet the following Christmas, because somebody cared, the kids put on some delightful drama.

A woman's role was to be passive, submissive. Inferior status cut across ethnic lines. Arab women had suffered purdah from the early days of Islam, after the Prophet's favourite wife, Ayesha, betrothed at the age of nine, lost her necklace in suspicious circumstances and a seclusion order was placed on all Muslim women. In Manama, Arab females, swathed in black, faces screened by hideous masks, padded barefoot out of doors, some scuttling like frightened rabbits at the sight of a European male.

Excluded from office and relegated to subordinate roles, virtually all women were victims of the purdah system. A few were permitted to poke their heads above the parapet, momentarily. Sybil, Lady Hay, organised entertainments for the troops and her daughter, Mary, did the same for the officers. Marjorie Belgrave, as female education director, did what good she could in her husband's ponderous shadow.

A woman's place was clearly defined. This was not Kuwait, where oil wives were encouraged to find work (or at least not discouraged), nor puritanical Arabia, where American wives formed social or

charitable groups. In Awali at the beginning of 1953 there were 387 wives, 324 of them British, and 374 children. A lot of talent was lying idle.

Manama seemed a little better placed and at this time a Ladies' Club was formed by Lady Belgrave and Mrs Yateem, wife of Hussain Yateem, merchant and the ruler's speechmaker, and other women with prominent husbands. It was promptly condemned by local politicians - all men - as elitist.

In Awali, British and Irish women employees, numbering around 60 against nearly 700 men living as bachelors, were of a lower order. Only two were in a position to issue instructions, the matrons of the hospital wings. No woman doctor, no managers or supervisors, but nurses, teachers, clerks, secretaries and business machine minders. The promotion ladder was available only to men. In a situation where women might have exploited their rarity value, there developed certain customs, or fetishes, designed presumably to uplift otherwise mundane lives. One was the ritual hairwashing, pursued as religiously as immersion in the Holy Ganges.

I was sure that no more than the innocent truth was conveyed when Joan said to Margaret, "See you in the club tonight," and earned the riposte, "Can't...John's washing my hair."

Most of Awali's women employees had a personal hairwasher and macho operators from the refinery, like Mike and Tom, and office dandies like Charles and Anthony were easily cajoled to perform. It was hardly surprising that indolent wives rejected the company's standing invitation to them to establish a camp beauty parlour for it might have ruined the existing trade.

I was too distant from the action to understand its significance but if the women were exercising their wiles, I felt sure Delilah would have approved.

The other grooming idiosyncrasy was dress. American psychedelic shirting had not yet crossed the Gulf and the Brits set a lead in sober suiting, the traditional white or khaki cotton in work shops and offices. But there were formal occasions which gave rise to conventions, when Bapco women, employees and wives, swapped flimsy print frocks of day for trailing gowns decked with brocade and fripperies at night; while the men strutted in black trousers with

black or cream dinner jacket, according to season, with bow tie and scarlet cummerbund.

As many of us, fresh from clothes-rationed UK, still clung to our demob suits for best, one had to wonder where these fine outfits came from. It led to a solemn sorting out of sheep from goats. In Kuwait, where British oil workers could express their opinions in the company paper, it was a compelling topic. Grown men slanged each other over modes of dress: de rigueur to one was infra dig to another. If the dressing down was tongue in cheek, as it might have been, the dressing up was real.

There was no point in dressing up and staying unobserved, so the fashion catwalk was the dance floor. For decorum, the place to be was the club on alternate Monday evenings in cooler months, when Jack and Doreen McCaskill gracefully led Old Tyme dancers through the St Bernard's Waltz and the Valeta.

The Formal Dance once a month was notable for numbers, elegance and the drawing of an imaginary demarcation line on the club's outdoor terrace. Married and formal folk sat on one side. On the other side of the tiled dance floor the bachelors and informals were ensconced, these being regarded as coarser in language and behaviour, public bar. It was nonsense, really. If you were informally dressed, you couldn't approach a girl you worked with, now formally attired, and ask for a dance. No doubt a lot of it was swank, keeping up with the Joneses. Providing people felt good without feeling superior, putting on the style was probably harmless.

It was McGregor's idea that I look for a woman's angle. He said to me one morning, "Why don't you go over to the commissary and listen to the women shopping? Listen to their gossip and moans and criticism." He paused. "I dare say it will be a waste of time, because most of what you hear you won't be able to print. But don't worry. You're getting paid for your time, wasted or not."

The commissary, the company monopoly store which in American lore bankrupted the workers, was in Awali an operation of no mean scope and efficiency. The first of the supermarkets, at least to expatriate Brits, it supplied everything from a pin to a case of whisky, a bottle of soda water produced on the premises to a side of

beef, consumer goods of almost every kind, a horn of plenty, whatever critics said.

The dollar crisis forced the postwar British Government to order overseas firms like Bapco to buy supplies in the Sterling Area. Foodstuffs then had to be bought in Commonwealth countries, notably frozen meat from Australia. The Ministry of Food in London had to authorise twice-yearly requisitions from the company. In theory, workers and families were "rationed," though the effect was otherwise. In 1951, Awalians consumed, on average, 341 lbs of meat against the UK average of 94lbs, and well over twice as much fish and poultry, three times as many eggs and twice as much tea and coffee and butter.

Buying staff had to scour sterling markets for goods and face long delays when shipping space was unavailable. Huge stocks were maintained where possible: Awali's cold store contained up to 90 tons of meat. The commissary, largely staffed by Indians, had to supply not only families, who could have orders delivered, but also the dining hall, canteens, the club and the company's rations to Arab workers. Prices appeared fair, hardly out of line with prices in the UK. According to the supervisor, it was company policy not to stock luxury goods on the grounds that employees would demand higher wages to pay for them!

I might have picked the wrong day for my research, for I found the housewives generally happy with their lot. Some personal preferences it was accepted could not be catered for. There was a universal belief in the avarice of others. When tidings of a shipment broke ("Bananas are in!" or "Toilet rolls have arrived!") a queue immediately formed at the commissary. The gluttony of some, it was said, deprived others of a share. The temptation to hoard was condemned. The principle seemed to be: "If they do it, that's greed; if I do it, that is prudence."

There was a sphere in which women were valued. That is to say, they commanded a price. To greater or lesser degree, most of us, local and foreign workers, got on together, somewhere between bonhomie and tolerance. But I had a long held, perhaps imperfect, opinion that those least well disposed towards "them bloody wogs" were the ones most eager to bed their women...

On a stifling night on the club terrace, prelude to our day off, the hour was late. A scattering of men and women sat listlessly at tables watching the ice cubes thawing in their lager glasses, while a pianist in the lounge was knocking out Nellie Dean.

Doug Ransome had told me, "I don't suppose I'll see much of you after this." "Not packing it in, are you?" I said.

"No, I've got a house. My wife will be here in a fortnight with our youngster."

Our table was shared with two workmates of Doug's, lesser men who were missing their wives and saw no prospect of an early reunion. One, not long out of his teens, said he married just before coming out. After a whispered conversation, his older companion announced, "We're going down to Manama for a bint. You want to come?"

Doug looked startled. The red light district! To me, he said, "What do you think?"

"Well, just for a lark, a shufti, I'm game," I replied.

Curiosity overcame his doubts and he agreed to tag along.

Of five or six taximen outside the club, only one would take us and he showed marked reluctance. He relaxed on the journey, handed round cigarettes and identified our destination as "Jassim's place."

Manama's outskirts were deserted, the hot, sticky air undisturbed save for the occasional howling of a desolate dog. We passed the lonely figure of a natur, night watchman, in a maze of black backstreets and after many twists and turns came to a sudden halt. Our driver motioned us to remain silent as he cautiously rapped on a door in the wall and uttered a muffled cry. The keeper of the house of ill fame, Jassim, shuffled to the door, drew a bolt and slowly opened it, whispering that all was well. Through a narrow entrance we squeezed, through the rising stench of a cess pit, into a walled enclosure which might have been a backyard but was in fact a room. Within these four rough stone walls, a sandy floor had a central strip of cheap matting and, against a wall, a narrow bed with sprawling metal legs, doubtless Jassim's. Two feeble oil lamps lit the room, while overhead the stars winked merrily.

Fetid grossly understated the atmosphere. The smell of defecation, human and animal, rank and overpowering, the grotesque shadows

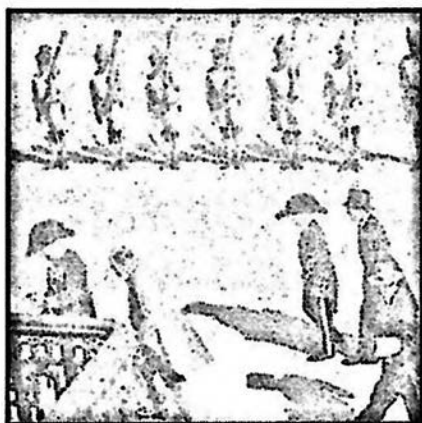


Christmas Card 1951



Shaikh Sulman, invested with the KCMG at Godaybia Palace, seated between Rupert Hay and Political Agent.

Left: Hay and Belgrave arriving for the investiture.



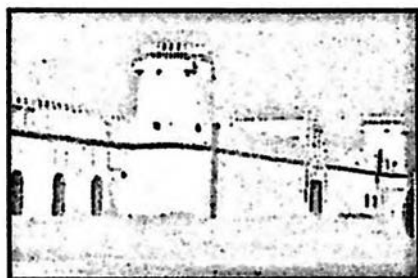
Right: Sulman's teenaged sons, Isa, Khalifa and Mohammed.

Below: Sulman with shaikhs, including police chief Khalifa.





Bapco Pony Club riders canter past solid walls.

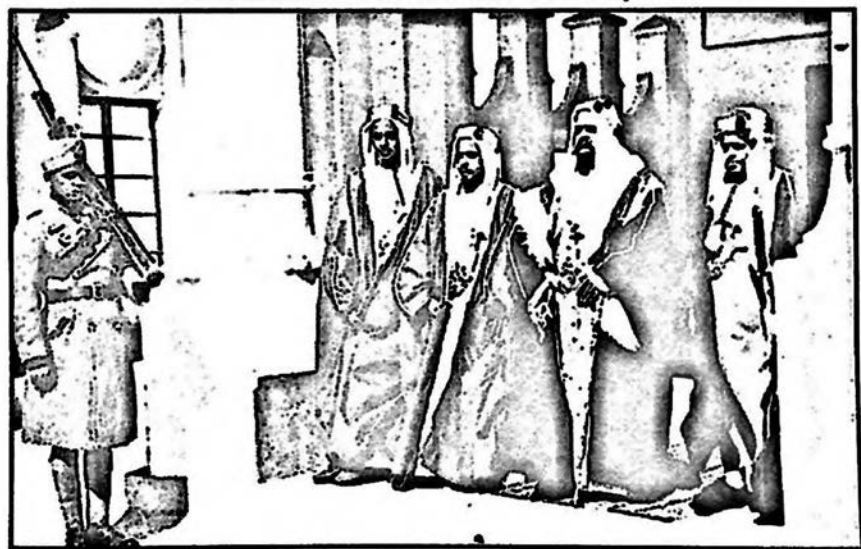


RAFAA PALACE



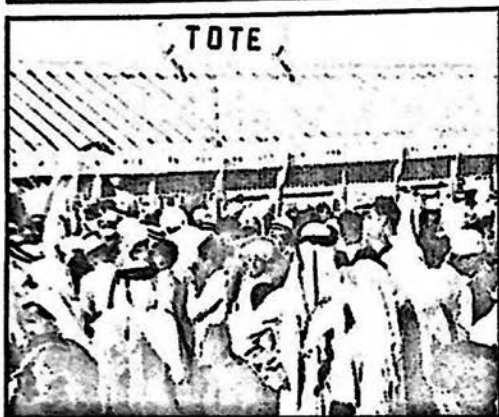
A petitioner puts his case at the ruler's Friday Majles.

Shaikh Sulman and sons at West Rafaa winter palace

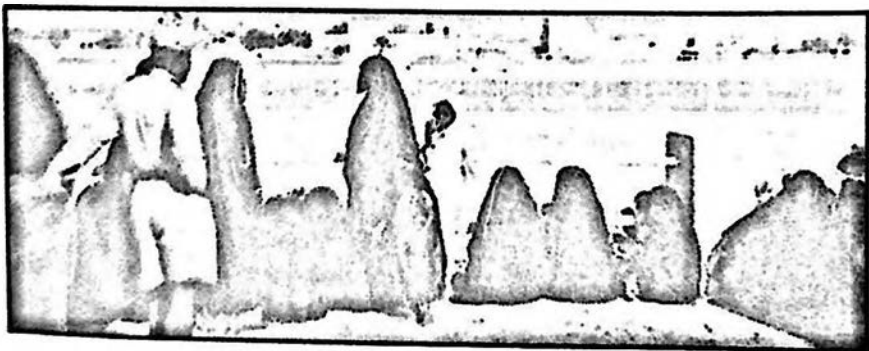




Manama Race Day

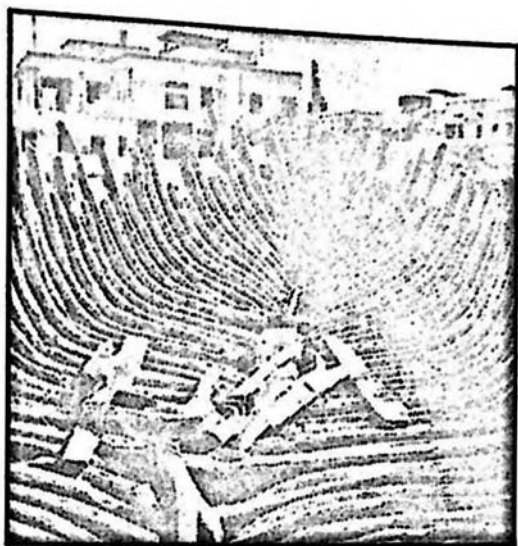


Above: Mothers in
their teens.
Below: Shaikhs'
wives gathered at the
rails.



RACE DAY excitement:
Swift horses, hopeful
punters, tired infants,
refreshment sellers - and
the municipal water cart
quenching thirsts by the
bucket!

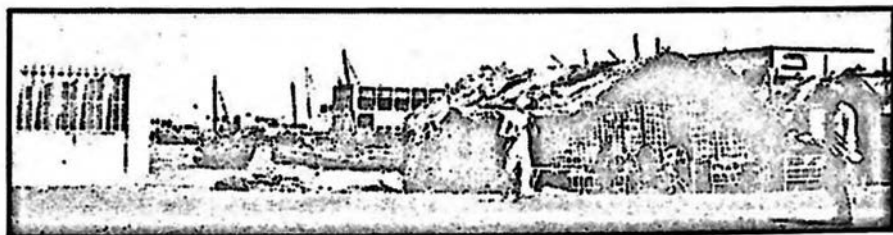


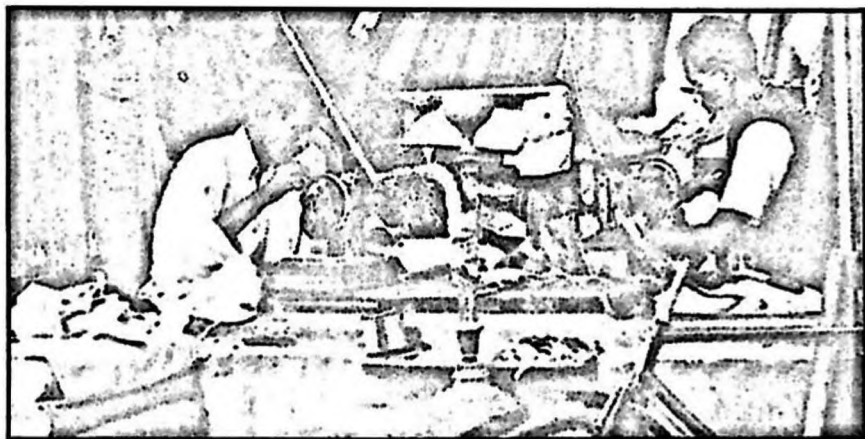


Trade Crafts

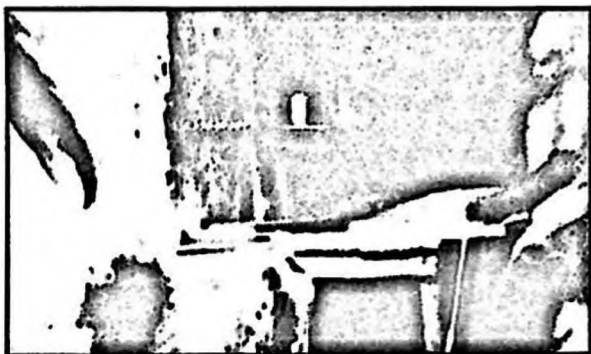
By the early 1950s, mechanisation made scant impact on traditional working methods. Simple tools fashioned the ship's hull (left) alongside Manama General Hospital.

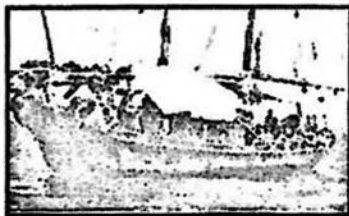
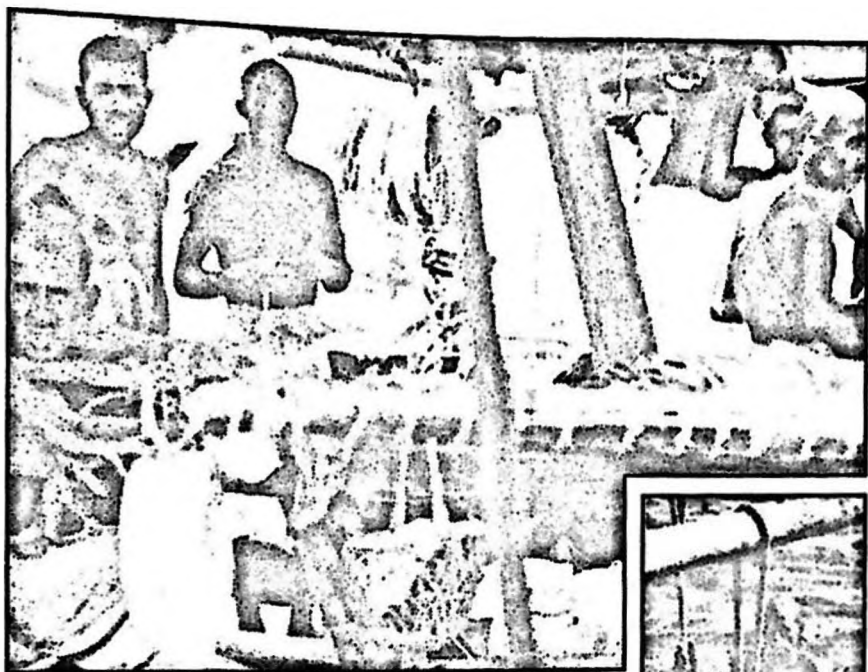
Below: A waterfront coffee shop, a date picker strapped to his tree. The butcher appears to be hanging himself.





**Hole in the wall
workshops for
Indian tailors, the
baker (right) with
clay oven and
(below) Bata shoe
shop.**





THE PEARL HARVESTERS

The ship (left), crew (above) and plunging divers (right). Aboard pearl merchants' dhow (below), oil workers and



dealers meet. Front left is Tom Hodgson and shirtless right is A.M. Amer.



7 Jolly good company?

MY DUTIES in the oil company included the entertaining role of paymaster. Whereas sterling-dollar payroll staff withdrew wages from their bank accounts at any time, rupee payroll employees - the labouring masses - had to form long snaking queues at the refinery pay office once a fortnight. The day before, a posse of clerks, Indians and sahibs, assembled in Accounts to make up thousands of pay packets. We worked in pairs, one Indian and one sahib. My partner was A da Costa. One filled envelopes with rupees and annas, the other checked them. I was instructed to meet my colleagues at 7.30 on pay day morning and I duly arrived at the refinery by bus ten minutes early. I had, however, misread my orders. The rendezvous was Awali.

My absence without leave at Awali precipitated alarm. The wages wagon swarming with armed guards and the gang of paybobs were ready and waiting. A messenger hastened to the dining hall to look for me, another was despatched to the bunkhouse. The hospital was phoned to see if I had reported sick. No Mapp! A relief paymaster was summoned and then the convoy set off for the refinery.

It was a sultry spring morning, the sun slowly climbing at a blinding angle. Hundreds of Arab workmen were already in line outside the pay windows, standing listlessly or squatting on their haunches. If any were collecting pay before work, they would be late clocking on, and what a row that would cause! It was nearly 8 o'clock. Half an hour late. Where were my colleagues? When they hove into view, someone in the queue let out a hoot. Others took it up, with ironic cheers.

Tom Hodgson, Irish and a wag, said: "Where were you then? We looked everywhere for you." I wasn't sure if he spoke the truth when he said, "This is a firing matter, y'know...next plane home!"

We paid out for about an hour, then returned to Awali for breakfast. The others ragged me about my absence. They said Smith

had been at the scene and was fuming. Back in the department, the section head came over to my desk. His tone carried menace. "Where were you this morning?"

We had two more trips to the refinery, at lunch time and end of the day shift. When we got back to Awali, Smith was waiting. He singled me out. "Now you're for it," whispered Hodgson. Smith addressed me with a hint of a smile. "I've got you an invitation to visit a warship tomorrow for the Islander."

It had been an interesting day's work, performed with lighthearted banter on both sides of the pay windows. I examined the worker's identity pass and number, then extracted his packet from my tray. He moved to an adjoining window where my assistant handed over the envelope and took the worker's inked thumbprint as a receipt.

Physical variations distinguished this labouring army: Arabs or Bahrainis lacking height, Persians with smooth features and those of African origins dark skinned and muscular. Among European garb, worn with the traditional check head scarf, British Army surplus - the commonest industrial uniform found anywhere east of Suez - was much in evidence. One man of jaunty mien behind an untrained beard cut a fine figure in Arab headdress and a naval captain's jacket, quality material with four gold rings on either cuff. That surely was not ex-WD!

I was a paymaster for almost a year, doing one duty a month. The scene at the refinery gates was unchanging. Hundreds of day shift workers queued at their respective barriers between 4 and 4.30. As soon as a gate opened there was a gentle surge, sometimes to noisy, joyful whoops. While a dozen or so khaki-clad security men stood around to see fair play, a guard at each exit ran his hands quickly over each employee's body (not white employees) and inspected food and water cans to ensure no company property was being filched.

My pay packets increased from about 500 on the first occasion to 672 on the last. More significant was the increase in wages. Under pressure, the management raised wages by 10 per cent or one rupee a day, whichever was the greater, and awarded certain allowances. My 672 envelopes had a total value of Rs 62,906 or nearly £4,725. That averaged roughly £7 a man for a fortnight's work, including in some cases a little overtime.

One man opened his packet and with a wry smile said, "What good is this to me?" He outlined his budget, topped by "75 rupees for the landlord" for a month. Compared with pre-oil days, Arab wages were high, but living costs had soared. Rents were outrageous. Even the barasti, the palm-frond hut with no light, water or sanitation, cost about a pound a week.

If money was a reward for endeavour, so was the word of appreciation. If you saw a Bapco man whack another Bapco man across the shoulders and exclaim, "You're doing a swell job!" you knew he had been on JRT. Job Relations Training (JRT) and Job Instruction Training (JIT) were part of in-house education for all staff men. They were methods used widely in American civil and military establishments. Brits who went through the four-day course did not condemn it out of hand. Many thought the scheme sound; the fault lay in not practising what was preached.

The concepts were simple, blinding glimpses of the obvious. JIT meant training a senior employee to train a junior. The senior (as instructor) would not merely tell his junior how to do a job, but show him how to do it, then get him to do it unaided. This was known as the Four Step Method, and little cards which set out the steps were issued for carrying in a shirt pocket for instant recall.

The essence of JRT was making an underling, of any grade, feel good. Give credit where it was due. Acknowledge accomplishment with a pat on the back and say, "You're doing a swell jaab!" And remember, happy workers produce more. The company couldn't raise a worker's pay or promote him every time he did a swell job. But a pat on the back...now there was reward.

The first lesson in human relations had been delivered as part of indoctrination by Mr W Thompson Taggett, deputy chief of fire and safety division, whose 90-minute lecture in low Scottish tones mixed amusing anecdotes, Anglo-American idioms and barrack room phrases. As a 15-year man, his close contact with the Arabs had endeared them to him. We new arrivals should treat the natives in friendly and courteous manner. We should help and educate them at work; regard them as fellow employees; remember that they never had the opportunities afforded us, etc, etc.

In the main, he said, the Arab lived today as he had before the dawn of Christendom. We, brought up in civilised communities, were apt to look on local customs as absurd, even repulsive; to regard the Arab as a knave or child. Thus, too often we cursed them and berated them for their stupidity when we should be sympathising with them for their lack of education and seeking to enlighten them.

After regaling the other recruits and me with examples of native stupidity, Thompson Taggett mentioned that the Bahrain refinery, one of the largest in existence, was built mainly with Arab labour, which source largely maintained and operated the plant under supervision. He added, "In taking a company job, the Arab has made big sacrifices. When he was idling away time or fishing, etc, at least he did what he wanted to, whereas now he is tied to a routine and discipline." The sermon, begun with understanding, ended with condescension. The pace of Arab advancement was a matter for dispute, the local politicians charging Bapco with holding Bahrainis back, but the level of competence was not. Among production records set in 1952 was the manufacture of a million steel drums, and the management boasted that apart from a single British supervisor, the drum plant was manned exclusively by local employees. Whether the din in the plant had any bearing - it was excruciating - was left unsaid.

Perhaps the transport department provided a better illustration of native or acquired skill. The department covered a wide range of activities, from marine work - servicing ships with pilots, tugs and stevedores - to road building, to maintaining anything mobile, from giant cranes to motor cars. The department's payroll numbered 750, all but 30 of them Arabs, Persians and Indians. Bapco's Bahraini bus drivers carried over 3,000 workers between home and job each day and had never had a serious accident.

The year 1952 was a milestone for an elite corps of Bapco men. They had been recruited in 1937, when the refinery was in its infancy. They were men with modest skills, or none, who stayed at their posts during the war. Now they paraded before the general manager to collect their 15-year service pins. They had got on. Stan Tonge, from humble operator, was now assistant refinery

superintendent in charge of cracking. C M 'Pat' Pattison had risen from machinist to controller of spare parts. Fred Farmer, refinery operator, was now shift engineer in the power plant. Henry Catlow started as a chemist and progressed to refinery manager. Below him, as refinery superintendent, was Fred Walstow who had started as an operator. Leslie Smith, after various accounting jobs, had the new administrative manager post, responsible for personnel and accounts departments.

These were all Britons. Some had replaced American managers. A Canadian, Bud Machin, who arrived in 1939, moved from operator to design engineer, to superintendent of transport, to the new post of manager of maintenance and construction.

At this time, Ahmed bin Ali completed 20 years service, the first Bahraini so to do. Brown, the general manager, gave him a pat on the back, a service pin and a handshake. A photo was taken and printed in the Islander. It was a proud, historic moment. Ahmed had improved himself. He was now a pumphouse operator, at the point where a European's career began.

Among expatriates, some stayed and prospered or were promoted and sent to supervise operations in new Caltex colonies. Others served a contract or two and then severed connections. Yet others, through dismissal or resignation, failed to complete the initial term. In these times, before stress and counselling became part of industrial currency, there was no cure for men who cracked except return to Blighty. Donaldson was an example.

When my three months in married quarters was up, a notice to quit from the housing office stated, "A room has been prepared for you in Bunkhouse 66." Prepared? The absence of matting, a mirror and a chair was soon rectified but the furniture was in a deplorable state. A chest of drawers contained a mound of rotting dates. With hot water and strong disinfectant, I got the cell a shade more wholesome. It must have been the room nobody wanted, on one side the wash house and on the other a drunken and friendless refinery operator who had done nothing and seen nothing while serving out his time. My neighbour, Donaldson, reckoned he ate one meal a day, dinner, which gave him an appetite for his nightly intake of 18 bottles of beer. Alcohol must have consumed almost all his wages.

His actions spoke as loud as his words: he had horrible shakes. He called on my first night to say Hello, and just managed to get clear of my room before being sick.

He was a sad creature, archetypal inebriate, winning no respect, sympathy or understanding; the sort you humour by allowing him to say a few words as you edge away on some urgent errand. If Bill, that was his name, wanted to pour out his troubles, I gave him scant opportunity. That was the absurdity, he had no use for his time and I had too little time for the many things I wanted to do. I did not inquire what work he did. Like soldiers after battle, one did not talk about work off duty. He was an operator, I knew, but operator was a generic term in the industry - as clerk or labourer- and I assumed an operator pushed buttons or turned on taps to operate something. But if his ambition was to sink deeper into the alcoholic mire, why come all these thousands of miles to do it?

Perhaps his workmates posed that question too. I supposed they covered up for him when he fell down on the job, knowing the time would come when the management would say, "No more chances; you're fired!" And it came to pass.

His replacement as tenant was a security officer, Sam Kemp, a well built man in his early thirties and ex-Palestine Police. I regretted afterwards that I missed striking up a friendship with him before he too made an unscheduled departure because we were politically in tune. He said he owned some property in a Scottish fishing village but a craving for excitement brought him abroad. He said he had worked with Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia during the war but was captured by the Germans. He was interned with men of many different nationalities, many of whom he feared perished under brutal treatment.

In 1946, he joined the Palestine Police and was in a building blown up by Jews. Wounded, he was presumed dead, but then he stirred under a white shroud. The patching up he received was marked by a square of ragged tissue on his chest, readily observed when we went to the swimming pool.

Bapco's Brits from Palestine were at one in liking their drink, but at odds on the Arab-Jew question. The senior security officer had a Jewish wife, Sam Kemp said. He added that he had himself taken

the Arab side in an argument with another Bapco policeman and almost come to blows, after which he asked for a transfer to another department, a course the management would not accept.

However, a satisfactory outcome resulted after Kemp got a flat tyre driving a truck across the desert. He should have walked to a wayside phone and summoned a repair man, but instead he continued to Awali with the tyre in ribbons. He was fired, but happy, especially as he collected his passage money and a month's pay in lieu of notice. That's what he said. During eight months in Bahrain he built up a library and he lightened his load by giving me a dozen volumes, including tales of Arabia and ballroom dancing instruction by Victor Silvester.

I wanted to believe all that Sam told me. He seemed an honest guy. But I had met a number of apparently honest guys in past months and now I began to develop a suspicion that a gang of Walter Mitty clones was abroad. Obviously, they needed someone to visit their flights of fancy on. But why pick on me?

Where the parting of company and employee was less than amicable, there was no hanging about. The worker hastened to clear his bank account, leaving as little credit as possible for the management to seize for the air fare home. And the firm wanted the man out on the first flight. On these occasions, a little comedy or drama was appropriate.

Devaney and Skidd arranged their dismissals with a measure of style, but then, they were Irish. Among Awali's white tribes, the Irish were probably the happiest drinkers and the most outgoing. No disrespect to the Scots, the most generous of people, whose strong sense of togetherness away from home presents the urge when two or three assemble to set up a Caledonian Society, leading to exclusive events such as Burns Night dinners when only superior outsiders - senior company and government officials and diplomats - might be granted the privilege of sharing celebrations.

Let all come was the Irish motto on St Patrick's Night in The Glen, a hollow where archers at leisure drew their bows. All who cared to buy tickets were welcome. Beneath the stars and fairy lights, ample barbecued meat and drink were consumed, and singing, dancing and banter, accompanied by jigs and other recorded Irish music,

kept nearly 200 guests in good spirits till around three in the morning.

As a group, the Irish were mostly young. The petite office girls made good horsewomen and the men competent footballers. At a guess, they had better academic records than the average employee. They also had a sense of humour that was not always appreciated. By virtue of close association in the accounts department, I was for a time an honorary member of their unregistered clan and joined them for occasional sessions of singing old and popular Irish ballads on a rest day afternoon. In the six hours between lunch and dinner, music would cease only long enough for glasses to be recharged. These men were from both sides of the border, from Derry down to Cork, but the spirit in which all sang such partisan pieces as *The Sash* and *Kevin Barry* proved *The Troubles* had no place here.

One of the group, Mike Devaney, knowingly courted trouble when shattering the sleep of the head of personnel at three in the morning by phoning to say, "Look here, Josephson, I just want to tell you what I think of the company and the management..." He got no farther because Josephson, not amused, said he would see him in the morning and cut him off.

Devaney, a cheerful extrovert, was determined to get fired. For a week he had been drunk on whisky and had little sleep. He might have been discharged earlier, but his services were valued because as the man in charge of travel, he could be relied on to turn out at any hour to see staff in or out at the airport.

His phone call produced the response he expected. Josephson told him to pack his bags and be ready for the flight out next day. "Can't be done, old boy," said Devaney, with a drunken chuckle. "My passport's in Baghdad. I sent it there for a visa and it won't be back for a week." That was true. He had sent his passport to Iraq for a visa that he did not want. It would take a week to come back to him, a week in which he could cock a snook at the bosses and carry on drinking.

Josephson made Joe Skidd successor to Devaney. Joe and I both hailed from Dagenham, my home and his workplace when he was a typist at Ford's. He was another hard drinker and had the strangest accent and might have been speaking Gaelic, so incomprehensible

was his English. For weeks he had been badgering the management for more money, without success. Now, in a new post, his first thought and demand was "more money." The personnel chief stalled. Then Joe, if I correctly interpreted his words, said: "You American slavers have no respect for us Irish coolies!"

At 10 o'clock, Skidd was introduced to the assistant political agent and sundry travel agents based in Awali as "the new man in charge of Bapco travel." At 1 pm, Josephson fired him. He caught the aircraft the next day, game to the last as he hurled drunken abuse at the Customs officer who confiscated a bottle of Benedictine. Promptly another young man, not Irish, was introduced all round as the new man in charge of Bapco travel. It was the joke of the week.

Long service pioneers and short term drunks all played a part, for better or worse, in creating the company's history and fortunes. The machinations of the industry were not their responsibility but of smart-suited men in distant boardrooms, now being targeted by the United States Government.

I was told to hold the front page of the *Islander* for an important despatch from New York, headlined CHAIRMAN REPUDIATES CARTEL CHARGES.

Caltex chairman Pinckard and his brother chairmen and presidents in associated companies used every channel they could lay hands on to refute accusations made by a US Government department. From my reading, the Administration had an open and shut case and all the oil moguls had to plead in court would be, "We have a complete answer to all the charges...Guilty!" But they took a contrary line.

The US Federal Trade Commission had produced a 900-page study of an alleged international cartel composed of five American companies plus Anglo-Iranian and Royal Dutch Shell, all the operators in and around the Gulf.

Summarising the document, *Petroleum World* reported that the seven controlled the bulk of international production and marketing. Operating through layers of jointly-owned subsidiaries and affiliated companies, they controlled not only most of the oil, but also most of the world's foreign petroleum refining, cracking, transportation and marketing facilities. In short, control of the oil from the time it was

taken out of the ground to the time it was sold at the pump was retained in one corporate family or group of families.

Answering this damning indictment, Pinckard said: "To our employees: I am glad to make the position of the California Texas Oil Company clear in view of certain charges made against it and other petroleum companies. No Caltex company is a member of any international oil cartel, or has overcharged any customer. Caltex intends to forcefully defend itself against all these charges and expects to prove fully its position in court at the proper time."

He continued: "Caltex was formed in mid-1936..."

That was a convenient starting point. However, to understand (or further confuse) the web of intrigue deeper delving into antecedent history might not have come amiss.

In the beginning, oil issuing from rock fissures provided the ancients with medicinal and boat caulking material. In commercial quantities, it was a latecomer to the Industrial Revolution and the first well to produce a flow was drilled by "Colonel" Edwin Drake, a former railway conductor, in Pennsylvania in 1859, the year before the American Civil War began.

A 20-year-old at that time, John D Rockefeller, a Baptist Sunday School teacher, was to emerge as the arch exponent of monopoly capitalism as he ruthlessly swallowed up the independent drillers and refiners who poured into Texas and Oklahoma to tap rich oil reservoirs. As the richest man in the world, Rockefeller gave away a vast fortune to education and humanitarian causes before he died in 1937, aged 97.

To the pioneers, oil meant distilling kerosene for illumination and Rockefeller's ambition was to light the lamps all over America and then the world. In 1882, he amalgamated a host of companies into the Standard Oil Trust and dominated mining, refining and transporting. Exporting to Europe and the Far East, Standard Oil came up against rivals who were exploiting the huge reserves at Baku in the Caucasus, notably the Swedish Nobel brothers, Rothschilds and a London East Ender, Marcus Samuel, whose family traded under the name of Shell. These were to unite with the Royal Dutch company and, ultimately, Royal Dutch Shell became

the world's biggest oil company. This company's production centre was the Dutch East Indies, where it had privileged status.

Royal Dutch, managed by Henry Deterding, and Standard Oil, led by Rockefeller, were engaged in a clash of the Titans, but the American was thwarted by his inability to win concessions from local rulers in the Indies. These he hoodwinked by setting up front companies with Dutch names.

In 1911, Rockefeller's dream of global conquest was shattered when the US Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of Standard Oil under Anti-Trust legislation and the split resulted in more than 30 offshoots. One of these, Standard Oil of California (Socal), was to bid for a concession in Bahrain and to outsmart the British Government, which wanted to keep Bahrain British, it imitated Rockefeller's Indonesian ploy by setting up the Bahrein Petroleum Company in Canada, ostensibly a British-linked firm but controlled entirely from California.

It was after Royal Dutch Shell entered the United States, tackling rivals on their home ground, that international oil interests recognised the value to them all of co-operation instead of outright opposition, on the principle of "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em!"

In an industry playing for high stakes, far higher when paraffin for light led to products for running motor traffic, manufacturing, heating systems and so on, the presence of mavericks was inevitable. Major Frank Holmes, a New Zealand mining engineer, was a prominent wheeler-dealer in the Persian Gulf intrigues; Calouste Gulbenkian was an Armenian middle man known to a wider public as Mr Five Percent on account of his commission on deals.

While Anglo-Persian (later Anglo-Iranian) was consolidating its position as sole oil producer in the Gulf, Gulbenkian was forming and reforming groups of financial and oil interests in the Turkish Petroleum Company for the purpose of working in Mesopotamia (Iraq). A new company eliminated Turkish bank finance, another German finance until, in 1929, British, Dutch, French and US oil companies came together as the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC).

Holmes was meanwhile active in the Gulf as representative of the Eastern and General Syndicate who functioned as brokers. He

secured a concession from Ibn Saud in Arabia in 1922. Later, he arranged to drill water wells in Bahrain - while keeping an eye on oil prospects - and water finds earned him the favour of the ruler and an oil exploration concession.

Many experts had a hunch that Bahrain had oil though, in the prevailing economic climate, none was prepared to back belief with the huge expense of exploration and exploitation. It was thought - whether at the time or with hindsight - that any Bahrain resource would be minuscule and any worthwhile quantity in Arabia. Holmes's syndicate scoured British fuel and financial sources to find one to buy his Bahrain concession without success. Across the Gulf, Anglo-Iranian watched anxiously. They did not want competitors. They did not want Bahrain's oil but wanted nobody else to have it.

The British Government, as major shareholder in Anglo-Iranian and protector of Bahrain, had twin reasons for keeping foreigners out. But Holmes, unable to attract British capital, turned to the Americans and found support from the US Government. He did find an American company - a subsidiary of Gulf Oil - willing to buy his concession, but there was a snag. The Iraq company in which Gulbenkian had a five percent share split the remaining 95 percent equally among four participants, Anglo-Iranian, French CFP, Royal Dutch Shell and Near East Development Corporation. This last was an American outfit, included at the behest of the US Government and made up of Gulf Oil and three other companies.

All of them accepted the terms of what was called the Red Line Agreement of 1928 which put them in the position almost of blood brothers. The line ran round the entire Arabian peninsula, encircling what was supposedly the limits of former Ottoman Turk territory. Oddly, offshore Bahrain was inside the line while mainland Kuwait was drawn outside. In this area, the partners could not compete against each by seeking concessions or buying or refining oil. Any advantages from operations in the area had to be shared equally. Now, as a participant, Gulf Oil was barred from taking up the Bahrain option through its subsidiary.

In the end, after six years of tedious argument and intense lobbying in the UK and US, Standard California acquired the Bahrain concession and thereafter Arabian rights. The British Government

in a rearguard action secured a condition that Britons would preponderate over Americans in the Bahrain workforce. (They happened to be cheaper.) Later, the British Anglo-Iranian and the American Gulf Corporation jointly won Kuwait. The Iran shutdown in 1951 enabled the operators in the other states to forge ahead.

The mass of evidence published by the US Administration in 1952 claimed that the companies investigated were able to buy and sell among themselves in what amounted to bookkeeping transactions which produced extra profits that were not passed on to the customers. There were agreements to forestall future outbreaks of competition and these resulted in each charging identical prices, allocating trading areas and collaborating to avoid surplus production in any area which might distress prices elsewhere.

Another indictment, a second government report of 26 pages, analysed a running battle between the US administration and four US companies over prices charged on the nearly one-billion dollars of Middle East oil sold to Europe for Marshall Aid dollars, America's gift to assist postwar reconstruction. This claimed that the price of crude oil at Persian Gulf ports was not based on the actual costs of producing Middle East oil but on the much higher cost of production in the US Gulf. Therefore, prices were exorbitant.

The US report charged that the cartel ramifications were world wide, affecting North America, where Persian Gulf oil was dumped cheaply. At one time (1947) 223 Middle East wells produced an average of 1.37 million barrels per well in a year, while in the United States 425,000 wells yielded an average of 4,660 barrels.

In his plea of innocence, Caltex chairman Pinckard said: "Caltex was formed in mid-1936. Its independent competitive activities are attested to by its considerable growth, expansion and acceptance by customers in foreign markets during the brief period of its existence. In fact, Caltex has increased its business some 600 per cent since the war, and we are certain that our constantly increased activities have contributed greatly to the economies of the countries and to the well being and standards of living of the people in the areas where we operate.

"Increasing beneficial commerce has been established between the free nations of the Eastern Hemisphere. Our operations are now

spread into some 60 countries, and our policy has always been to conduct our business definitely and positively in conformity with the laws and regulations of each country concerned.

"In steadily growing volume, our Middle East oil supplies have greatly helped to stimulate industrial and productive activity and to provide heat, power and transportation for the free countries of the Eastern Hemisphere. Carried further, this means more food, clothing and other necessities of life for their people. At the same time, the producing countries of the Middle East have benefited through revenues for industrial development, better roads, hydro-electric projects, transportation, schools and other advancements.

"We have sought to combine our technological skills, financial resources and distribution and marketing experience with the ability and know how of the countries in which we operate to help make it possible for the great oil supplies of the Middle East to serve as the lifestream of progress and security for all.

"Caltex has made investments of hundreds of millions of dollars in refineries, ocean tankers and market facilities in the Eastern Hemisphere and more than 22,000 persons in these countries have been provided direct employment. Their wages and salaries add millions of dollars to the domestic economy of their countries.

"With respect to the alleged overcharges for crude oil, I repeat: our prices have been entirely fair and fully competitive..."

According to the chairman, in those countries which bought Caltex oil, "the foreign governments concerned also took their own steps to assure themselves that the prices were satisfactory."

One of the Caltex partners, Standard California, stated in its Management News Letter, August 1952: "Few American industrial ventures abroad have created such good will towards the United States as have the Bahrain and Saudi Arabian developments. This has been a real 'Point Four' program, without cost to the United States Government; on the contrary, the United States has benefited by the strategic availability of petroleum for our country and for its military operations.

"Standard Oil Company of California and its affiliates in these Eastern Hemisphere activities always have worked on the theory that what was best for the United States, the foreign countries

involved and the customers who bought the oil was best for the companies themselves in the long run. Utmost care has been taken to abide not only by the laws of the United States, but also all the other countries concerned. As a consequence, our people have been welcomed by all the countries into which we have entered."

There was no doubt that the oil companies had done well. The first world war made Anglo-Iranian, the second the operators in Bahrain, Arabia and Iraq, and all of them with Kuwait profited from the Korean war. Rearmament and postwar reconstruction further boosted the demand for Gulf oil. In a seller's market, the companies could not fail to make a pile.

Bapco was not alone in having the armed services in during the second war, building specialised plant to meet military needs. The companies were less than grateful for these gifts from the taxpayer, arguing that government was interfering with private enterprise.

Caltex was also able to assemble a tanker fleet at knock down prices from the armada built in US shipyards up to 1945. Some of these ships had never even put to sea.

Who really profited in the end? Did shareholders grab an unfair cut, or executives bask in the sun? The US and UK governments did well out of taxation. The oil states probably got a raw deal until 1951, when all demanded half the companies' profits from production. In Bahrain a deal was late emerging and Bapco made modest interim royalty increases which looked like untold wealth to the government. One thing was certain. Vast sums from profits were ploughed back to create more prosperity.

The cartel charges were never put to the test, thanks to events in Iran. Following the Tehran parliament's nationalisation vote, the oil industry fell idle. The company's 2,500 British employees announced they would not work for a state organisation and Anglo-Iranian withdrew them. A government attempt to restart production using independent operators was frustrated when Anglo-Iranian said it would claim ownership of any oil marketed abroad.

Sporadic talks between London and Tehran in vain bids to secure an accommodation and return to business, a British Government appeal to the United Nations, riots in Iran, the overthrow and return of the Shah, all kept the pot boiling. When Gen Eisenhower was

elected Republican president of the United States in November 1952 and while Senator Joseph McCarthy was still riding high on his Red witch hunt, the British Government had no difficulty selling the new American administration the idea that the Iranian Government under prime minister Mohammed Mossadeq was a communist menace that would open the way to Soviet takeover of the Iranian oil industry.

A joint CIA-MI6 operation in August, 1953, codenamed Ajax, was mounted to bring mobs on to Tehran streets in support of the Shah and the aim of toppling Mossadeq succeeded. A year later, the Iranian Government agreed to pay compensation of up to £238m to Anglo-Iranian, which invested 40 percent in a new company, British Petroleum.

The Shah said his country was broke and President Eisenhower gave him a 45m-dollar grant. Fearing Soviet intervention, the American administration decided Iran needed help to rebuild its economy and proposed the setting up of a consortium of 17 oil companies to get Iran back into production within a stable, orderly international oil market. Eight major companies in this group expressed alarm at being invited to enter the political arena. What about the Anti-Trust laws? Washington placed security in the face of perceived communist menace higher than legal niceties. Best leave well alone. The cartel charges were quietly buried.

THE PRINTED word, not only in oil company journals, wittingly or otherwise, might have conveyed the impression that Bahrain was on the fringe of paradise. Those who saw nothing but excellence could have improved their case by inserting the qualifying words "relatively" or "comparatively speaking."

Looking at Bahrain beams I was mindful of English notes. I had some experience of rough living in wartime. In the Suffolk village of Redlingfield in 1948, where I did my agricultural stint, conditions fell short of lavish: musty thatched cottages, one communal hand pump in the main street for water, night soil buckets emptied once a week, paraffin lamps and a smoky oil stove for reheating the week's supply of fried fish and stale meat pies that old Florence Coe, my landlady, cycled to Eye to buy. In regular letters to the press, I condemned the conditions and the comfortably off farmers and landed gentry who sat on the local council and appeared to ignore the plight of the rural poor.

In Bahrain's towns and villages, the poor - and some of the wealthy - had to grin and bear their circumstances. About what I observed, I would have readily written (though to whom?). It was galling to read glib phrases about the good life after witnessing in open squares on the edge of town, and even in Manama's back streets, men and boys squatting publicly to defecate. Human excrement could be found everywhere. The only public convenience I saw in Manama was a stone hut overhanging the low sea wall. A hole in the floor peered down on the water, an instant flushing system. These saline shallows were the scene of mass evacuation at the dawn hour when townfolk in numbers slipped over the sea wall, paddled out a convenient distance and after going through the motions of washing raised their shirts or robes and crouched buttocks to water and passed motion.

If the situation was unhealthy and unpleasant, it was not without hope. Change was slow, but improvements were on the way.

Freeing Bahrain from the bondage of illiteracy started in 1919 when Shaikh Isa's popular son, Abdulla, came back from a visit to England, enthusiastic for education, and launched a public appeal for funds. He set up a committee of well to do but largely illiterate merchants with himself as president.

Generous donations totalled over 300,000 rupees (£22,500), of which two-thirds was spent on building the first school in Muharraq. The cost was excessive, due in part, it was claimed, to payment for certain materials which were never delivered. The committee treasurer, a Muharraq merchant of Persian stock, Yusuf Fakhroo, was challenged over his management of funds and in due course he resigned.

Education was an imported shoot, planted in alien soil. Without a culture and tradition, its growth was bound to be difficult. Foreign influences dominated from the outset. A small population and meagre resources were hardly a solid foundation. Teaching help had to be sought from abroad, especially Egypt, Syria and Iraq, countries that were anxious to throw off European control. Bahrain was fertile ground for politically minded teachers to sow anti-British and anti-feudal sentiments. Later, the British Council was to provide assistance. But the most profound intervention was the arrival of the oil company, bringing with it the English language.

Whatever objective the founding fathers laid down, quantity rather than quality appeared to be the prime factor. Syllabuses looked impressive: Arabic reading and writing, history, geography, religion, maths, bookkeeping and science for boys; and the three Rs, needle work and the Koran for girls. But when pupils left after two or three years unable to read or write, the system began to be questioned. After 30 years, not one Bahraini doctor or qualified engineer had been produced, though the American University in Beirut had just awarded the first BA degrees to Jasim Fakhroo, funded by his mercantile family, and Yusuf Shirawi, a government scholarship student, who was made science and maths teacher at Manama secondary school for boys. More than half the teachers

were local men and women, with only four years of secondary schooling and rudimentary teacher training.

Turbulence was long part of the system, with graft among the education committee and political activities among imported teachers. When two Syrian head teachers quarrelled and were dismissed, one went home and started a virulent anti-Bahrain Government campaign which the Middle East press took up. The sackings had led teachers to strike and boys to march about the towns for several days, shouting anti-government slogans taught by their teachers.

In numerical terms, development was impressive. A revolutionary concept which had to overcome stiff opposition was provision of a girls' school in 1928. By 1952 there were eight girls' schools and a total roll of 2,000. A secondary class of 11 girls had just been started in a primary school, a secondary school being out of the question because girls left early to marry and parents regarded 15 as too old for school.

From these primary schools came most of the female teachers, only one girl having been sent abroad for higher education. According to Mrs Belgrave, director of female education, some of the teachers were capable, but others lacked communication skills and disliked having to read books.

The fillip, in some cases the introduction, to education in the Gulf was provided by the oil companies. They had resources that governments could not match. A report by Bapco's training chief, Berdine, in 1951 showed that Aramco in Arabia was spending about 3½m US dollars a year on education and training, Anglo-Iranian almost as much in the Abadan area, and Bapco 400,000 dollars. Spread over indigenous employees, averages per head were Aramco \$215, AIOC \$112 and Bapco \$66, in sterling terms £77, £40 and £24.

The companies were, of course, concerned with training for production not education for its own sake. The key to all education and training was the English language. The minority, expatriates, would never learn Arabic to any appreciable extent, that was obvious, so the majority had to learn an alien tongue, a majority which could not read or write its native language.

Bapco got down to education in earnest in the late 1940s. Small numbers of young employees were sent to Beirut on short scholarships. A prep school on company premises offered up to a hundred places at a time on four-month courses in English, arithmetic and typing, and separate classes in technical subjects.

Where this would ultimately lead, some British claimed to know. They complained, "If we train them, they'll take our jobs." Everyone seemed to know of an Ali or a Yusuf who had been on a course and come back a 'know all,' insolently challenging orders, insulting older Arabs. And dirty work was beneath them!

English had to become a core subject in state schools. There was alarm when the first Khalifa boys were sent to the US or Nottingham University and promptly sent back as incapable of instruction in English. British institutions put a block on Bahrainis.

Unfortunately, not only knowledge was lacking but an ethos. Charles Belgrave, the great innovator, began to question the achievements of the system. He complained about the half-educated who were frightened to soil their hands. Somebody had to be coolies, his term for labourers. As for higher education in Beirut: it failed to instil the esprit de corps of the public schools in England!

Ahmed Al Umran, director of education, pointed out that English could only be taught satisfactorily by an Englishman. But appointing one would invite "invidious comparisons" in the secondary school, with all teachers demanding equal pay and conditions of service. This problem was overcome by Bapco agreeing to provide a teacher, Frank Davey.

Davey, who was to say of his boys, "They are conscious of the backward state of Bahrain and are keen to learn," was a popular, inventive lecturer. It was at his instigation that Bapco management invited all the secondary teachers to spend a rewarding and instructive day in the refinery and Awali. He was one of a number of ex-Abadan men recruited by Bapco. They spoke in scathing terms of their new employer, not a patch on Anglo-Iranian, and of Bahrain and Awali, culturally as barren as the desert after what they had been used to. Perhaps it was as well that they tended not to stay long, for their carping was a threat to the fragile morale of Bapco's old hands. But Davey had a point: after nine years in Iran, he was

shocked to find himself in the bunkhouse in Awali. I was surprised, however, when he told me at dinner one evening that he had resigned. He had always said how happy he was teaching in Manama. I asked what the trouble was. "Berdine," he said. Ah, Berdine. "What about Berdine?" I asked.

Davey explained that in a meeting with the general manager, he suggested the teachers' tour and spoke frankly about shortcomings in company and government education. Berdine, now personnel supremo and in charge of education, was present. Shortly after, Berdine told Davey that he was to be swapped with another ex-Abadan teacher, then working in Awali. As the other was content with Awali, there seemed no point in the switch, said Davey. He was mystified. His work had not been criticised. He could only think that Berdine had taken umbrage at his candid criticism in front of the general manager and was taking revenge. Davey said he would have to resign and Berdine accepted that. He must have engineered the outcome, Davey concluded.

The boys in Manama threatened to boycott classes unless Davey was reinstated, but he prevailed on them to desist, promising that his departure would be only temporary. He was given a splendid send off by the school and presented with a silver model dhow and a leather bound volume of Oscar Wilde.

A curious, even childish, personality clash, I thought. But I had been misinformed, I was told many years later by Bapco's public relations manager, Mahmood, who had been a boy in Davey's class. What happened was that a boy accused the BBC of telling lies and Davey reprimanded him, saying the BBC had to rely on its correspondents for accuracy. Then later, a BBC crew visited the school and Davey ordered the boy to repeat his accusation to them. This incident reached the ears of Belgrave, and he, inexplicably incensed, complained to Bapco management. Davey was recalled to Awali and he resigned.

Between 1928 and 1951, state school rolls increased from 720 boys and girls to over 6,000, and expenditure from Rs30,000 to Rs2,120,000 (about £159,000). Hundreds had to be turned away because classrooms and teachers were lacking. A boy could spend two years in infant school, four in primary and four in secondary.

When boys in village, infant and primary schools reached 4,000, only 131 were in the sole secondary school, and these were the boys who would be depended on to run the civil service, commerce and industry in a developing state. They were aged 13-20 and took a four-year course which included simple physics and chemistry, religion, arithmetic, history and geography. English occupied eight hours a week in a senior class. School was open from 8am to 1.30, six days a week. There was a huge waiting list for admission.

With an Egyptian heading a foreign teaching staff of a dozen or so, including two Indians, the secondary school had suffered from not having a rigorous curriculum. The head usually designed his own syllabus, but it was decided in 1952 to initiate an Oxford examination course, with roots in primary schools. The employment of Egyptians sometimes presented problems for they remained on their own government's books and were paid by both the Egyptian and Bahraini authorities.

In October 1952, headmaster Rushdi failed to return from Egypt for start of term. Next day, a number of boys stayed away. Some days later, teachers complained that they could not function properly without books, but the caretaker said he could not open the book cupboard without the head's permission. Rushdi eventually returned to work, 18 days late, but two other Egyptians were still adrift.

Aside from shortage of accommodation, staff and money, education was at the mercy of the climate. Many buildings were ageing, natural light and ventilation were minimal and there were no electric lights or fans. "Boys get drowsy in summer and don't understand what they are being taught," said a head teacher, Jishy, by way of explaining the 3½-month holiday in the hot season.

Hasan Al Jishy was the only Bahraini head. He was still in his twenties, though he looked older, and had more than 600 boys in his school, West Manama Primary. His 17 teachers took charge of classes smaller than 30 or larger than 50.

The school was very clean and tidy, though not well lit, and the boys generally were clean though their cast off European dress was shabby. I noticed only one wearing glasses, yet I suspected many more needed them and there was marked evidence of eye disease. Their desks were crude and while designed for two frequently had to

take three at a pinch. Dickensian surroundings were no dampener on the humour of youngsters who were bright and attentive and, with arms raised, eager to answer questions in English, which they learned for six or seven hours a week.

Bahrainis rarely gave any indication of musical interest although they had work songs. In one classroom, small boys sang a song about pulling a carrot: "...I tried to pull; then my mother came, then my sister; we held on to each other and pulled. But it would not come up. Then my cat came, then a rat, each holding on and pulling. Finally my big brother came and at last we got the carrot out." Keeping to a tempo and in tune, the boys were guided by snatches played on a harmonica, the school's only instrument. The ruler forbade the piano, but Jishy couldn't say why.

Schools came in all sizes. A few were very large houses, aged and ramshackle. One school crammed 750 boys into a warren of tiny rooms, knowing that hundreds were outside waiting to get in. Another I visited, at Hedd, had about 250 boys, aged six to 14, the older ones shoeless, the younger dressed in blue cotton uniforms. The premises were clean and pleasantly situated alongside the sea wall and the boys worked from eight till one.

The villages, with a third of the country's population and mainly Shia Muslims, claimed they were neglected. About half a dozen had schools which provided up to five years of primary education. Because of public pressure, Bapco built three village schools in 1952 at a total cost of £6,000 and these were handed over to the government for two-year courses.

Least popular in state schools was technical education. One small school provided simple wood and metal work for up to 50 boys.

The oldest institutions were the Koran schools. Passing through the bazaars in the towns it was not unusual to hear a swell of piping voices, struggling for rhythm and unison, filtering through a closed door of a shuttered shop or workshop. A peep through a crack revealed in dusty twilight a score of tiny boys and girls sitting cross legged on an earth floor, each with a much used book on a tiny wooden stand containing verses of the Koran which they chanted together and learned by heart.

Arabic was not time-tabled in the Awali primary school for expatriate children. But the company offered Western employees the chance to learn basic colloquial Arabic. I enrolled in the class taught by a Persian, Faizi, and collected the 250-rupee reward for passing an oral and written exam. Our class had no course books, the blackboard sufficed. It was interesting to see how the Kuwait Oil Co, with its British influence and Persian experience, tackled the language question. It commissioned a 250-page pocket book of Kuwaiti Arabic in Roman script. With accompanying gramophone records, it covered bilingually every aspect of KOC operations, domestic matters and Kuwaiti life: history, geography, industries and so on. Its vocabulary had over 3,500 words.

Pioneering work by the American Mission Hospital and the British Political Agency's tiny Victoria Hospital led to the start of a public health service in Bahrain in the late 1930s, at its heart the Government Hospital on the Manama seafront, where Government Road and Lulu Road met. It might have come earlier but for the lack of finance and the fear and religious prejudices of inhabitants.

One wondered how they managed before, with the diseases borne by flies and mosquitoes, imported scourges such as TB and cholera and the general absence of sanitation and hygiene.

The general hospital was followed by small isolation units, a mental hospital - officially styled lunatic asylum - a 100-bed women's hospital, small hospitals in Muharraq (ten beds) and Hedd (six beds) and simple dispensaries in larger villages. The advent of wonder drugs in the 1940s helped the fight against TB and leprosy and to halt sudden invasions of typhoid and smallpox. Further progress was hampered by inadequate resources: the Government could not afford to pay the higher salaries which would entice British doctors, while the Indian Government was reluctant to shed doctors it needed at home. It was fortunate that among Manama's expatriates from east and west were idle wives with medical training and these were engaged for modest wages.

The situation was not ideal. Wealthier Bahrainis continued to take their expensive ailments to Beirut or Baghdad but at least this made room for indigent sufferers from the mainland and southern states. I was impressed by what I saw and perplexed by the critical attitudes

of my political friends in Manama. They damned the health service in general and the senior medical officer since 1940, Dr Snow, in particular.

Snow was a thoughtful man, witness this preface to his latest annual report. "I suppose no one could ask for better patients than Arabs. Reasonable, philosophic and quietly humorous, they are patient in their sickness. Their good manners place them as a race apart. They will always give an arduous course of treatment a fair trial and their fortitude is a great asset in grave illness...

"Medicine is an art which penetrates to the deepest recesses of every human being. It is not enough to hand out drugs mechanically. The art is in the approach. A grateful patient will sometimes recall his cure but kindness, consideration and tenderness will remain in their minds when all else has been forgotten. These attributes for inspiring confidence are never failing, especially in children who respond so rapidly after a few days in hospital...A human being is a most important person. When ill he is the most important person to himself in the world. Until the distresses of all mankind have entered into a doctor's life, he will never appreciate the whole nature of man nor achieve a whole cure.

"Human beings reflect singly their qualities as nations. Physically, they are born, grow up, eat, sleep, love, work, die. Religiously, they aspire to a God. They rear families. They dwell in houses in differing environments. They work and enter into the life of a nation. Intellectuals apply this inter-relationship with a greater force and influence. Public minded men produce far reaching reforms and improvements. The construction of a satisfying economic whole depends on these factors being rightly blended: a giving to society and receiving from it those benefits produced by the common weal. Its highest hopes are born out of self-sacrifice.

"Medical work has to influence all these creative factors. To treat disease is always necessary but it is starting at the wrong end. The beginning is to treat the environment, overcome prejudices, improve houses and ways of living, remove detrimental influences and nature's scourges and discourage harmful practices. From then on it becomes a matter of permeating public bodies with ideas for the

needs of communities and the correlation of town planning with sanitation, water supply, care of foodstuff and general cleanliness.

"Its appeal is individual, communal and national. Its aim is to maintain life at its highest," Dr Snow concluded.

His words would not travel far, for circulation of Government publications was severely restricted. And his idealism had yet to reach full flower in his own hospital. There was a matter of discrimination, although one had to be realistic. The western wards had air conditioning, the eastern electric fans; but then, one was fee paying, the other receiving free treatment. At least everybody went through the same operating theatre. Yet it seemed unfair that official reports could put names to the six British staff, surgeons, physicians, lady doctor and the anaesthetist, while dismissing others as six anonymous doctors, three men, three women, all Indian.

When I visited the general hospital, patients lounging on the sunlit entrance steps were awaiting shots or jabs or dressings, or consultation that might lead to admission. They would join the thousands listed as annual statistics. Also present was a handsome brown cow, its head neatly and expertly bandaged. She was an outpatient, along with a donkey.

The two-storey hospital carried on its flat roof a huddle of hot and uncomfortable laboratories in the charge of Mrs Hills, wife of the director of public works. White and stylish, it presented a striking contrast to neighbouring clusters of barasti dwellings and palm trees and the little used yards of sailing dhow builders. As one of the tallest buildings, it secured for convalescing Europeans permitted on the roof a fine view of Manama port and squat dhows at rest and beyond the limitless sunswept pale green sea. Turning about, eyes captured the untidy jumble of Manama town, the cluttered barastis on spaces between narrow streets of mud walled houses, a school, markets, spiky minarets of mosques and the flats under construction which signalled the dawn of a new era.

A handful of Arab men had worked at the hospital since its inception. Originally orderlies, they gained nurse status and dressed wounds. The female nursing staff was entirely British and Indian. Attempts to coax local girls into nursing were unsuccessful.

One of the ruler's two wives - the childless one, thought to be about 45 but of much older appearance - had recently been in the general hospital for an eye operation. She wanted to go to India to see a specialist, but HH objected. The hospital staff thought Snow should have operated, because he was a good man with eyes. The matron said, "It's marvellous to see him work." But His Highness summoned a Dr Banerjee from Bombay for a thousand rupees a day. The Shaikha was nursed for a month in an ordinary room with a screened off piece of verandah and a patch of thin grass. She was no trouble but her ten women servants crowded into an adjoining room and numerous visitors were forever under the nurses' feet.

"Thank goodness she's gone to Beirut to recuperate," the matron said.

The isolation hospital, largely used for TB and VD patients, shared its grounds with the 30-bed mental asylum, where vacancies existed. Psychiatric cases were kept singly in little cells with barred windows and doors. Among the men sitting in the sunny garden which they tended was one with an irregular habit of daubing his walls with his own defecation. Of three women, one pathetic little creature of about 20 years, mother of a baby four months old, was the victim of a fire which reduced her barasti home to ashes. In her anguished condition, she was being subjected to beating by her husband, a refinery labourer. The asylum gave her sanctuary.

Bapco opened its well regulated hospital in Awali in 1937. Before then, a dwelling was used: two bedrooms as wards, the lounge for outpatients and the kitchen as laboratory-dispensary. Two nursing sisters from those times - when it was "bedlam but fun", said one - were still about in 1953, Miss Heninghem (Hennie) and Miss O'Sullivan (Paddy).

The hospital was divided into East and West wings, geographically and racially, though again the operating theatre drew no distinctions. Extensions in 1952 increased beds to 105, and ten American, British and Indian doctors served a population of about 2,000 Europeans and 7,000 Eastern employees. Clinics were also provided at outlying installations. Nursing and technical staff were British and Indian, with a leavening of Bahraini male orderlies.

Everyone made at least one trip to Awali hospital each year for immunisation and check up. In fact, 1952 saw over 3,000 admissions, over 110,000 outpatient visits, 424 operations and more than 27,000 laboratory tests and X-rays. In that year, a new record for Anglo-American births was set, but at an unusually high mortality rate: 49 births (22 male, 27 female) included one still birth and one boy and one girl who did not survive ten days. Government hospitals recorded in 1951: live births 727, stillbirths 65, deaths within ten days 20, and maternal deaths 4.

Law and order, a prop of society alongside health and education, occupied pride of place in Belgrave's scale of values. The Adviser considered himself Commandant of Police while Shaikh Khalifa bin Mohammed was Superintendent of Police in charge of the department. Belgrave saw no conflicts in his various legal roles. The legislature, the executive and the judiciary amounted to pretty much the same thing. The ruling shaikh (with Belgrave's help) decided what should be law and made appropriate decrees and left his uncles, Abdulla and Mohammed, to dispense justice in the courts. At times Belgrave sat in judgement.

This tribal arrangement was echoed by Bapco, who made their own laws - enshrined in Guides to Employees and Personnel Regulations - and executed summary justice without recourse to appeal. It was not necessarily heavy handed nor devoid of natural justice. But where sign of misdemeanour was present, the management did not shrink from using the ultimate sanction of instant dismissal.

It was generally reckoned that Bahrain was one of the most law abiding places on earth, and Belgrave was not alone in asserting that but for wretched foreigners the island might be almost blemish free. The statistics were impressive. One might suspect that the police were not catching enough offenders, but Belgrave would have nothing said against his force.

Commenting on the second world war, Belgrave wrote: "The presence of foreign troops in the country for the first time in history, with close contacts between them and the inhabitants, and the inevitable opportunities of making easy money by illegal means, had a demoralising effect on the population which will take time to

eradicate." Drinking, gambling, drug taking, prostitution and venereal disease flourished then.

Next to foreigners, the main component in crime was probably alcohol. The two were usually inseparable. Awali residents had the worst record for drunken driving and illegally selling liquor to Muslims. It was an American construction worker who was convicted in the Agency court of raping a Bapco secretary. The odd murder, perhaps one a year was reported, was invariably a crime of passion involving some foreign Arab prostitute and a visiting Iraqi businessman.

As the protecting power, the British political agency had its own court for trying foreigners. Some oil workers appeared there, but it was more likely that Awali expatriates picked up by the company's police force were flown out quietly without fuss. Bapco never issued crime figures.

Under the company's code, it was illegal to keep a dog or participate in local politics. It was incumbent on the employee (described as himself, never herself) to behave decently and be law abiding and show due respect for the religion, customs and sensibilities of the people of Bahrain.

Warning was given of disqualification from free medical treatment where disability was due to "intoxication or to the use of alcoholic liquors as a beverage, or to the use of stimulants or narcotics, or to venereal diseases, or to unlawful acts or immoralities, or to fighting unless in self-defence against unprovoked assaults, or to other encounters such as wrestling or scuffling, or to injury received in any brawl or in a disreputable resort..."

Stainless characters were rewarded at five-yearly intervals with a service emblem, a choice of a pin, lapel button or watch charm studded with one star after 5 years, 2 stars after 10 years, up to 5 stars after 25 years; then one diamond and 4 stars, plus a gold watch (30 years), 2 diamonds, 3 stars (35 years) up to 5 diamonds (50 years).

Bapco's security force was multiracial and included watchmen and khaki-uniformed guards on gates, barriers and installations. Administration and sleuthing were in the hands of Brits drawn from the Palestine Police after disbandment in 1948. These, like former

Abadan people. did not take easily to Bahrain and three who were engaged as state police inspectors did not stay long.

A policeman's lot was not a happy one in the national force. The 1370 (1950-51) report from Shaikh Khalifa - a cousin of the ruler - stated, "The work of ordinary policemen in Bahrain is extremely monotonous, which probably contributes to the difficulty in recruiting suitable men. There is a daily parade in the early morning all the year round and sections take turns on outpost duty. Apart from traffic sections and the police station sections, the general duties are neither exacting nor interesting."

The best types of local men were working for higher pay in Kuwait and Arabia, so recruits had to be sought in the Trucial Coast and Oman, both for police and for natus who were basically watchmen, dressed in ragged white shirts fastened with ammunition belts, who carried ancient muskets and lanterns at night. Most in the service were illiterate; indeed the traffic section of three NCOs and 42 men could muster only one capable of reading and writing. But they were handy with guns and, in competitions, defeated rifle and machine gun teams from British warships and the RAF. Some of the traffic cops could recognise numbers, which was useful with increasing public mobility and accidents. A quarter of accidents involved taxis and taxi-buses, which were too many, often unroadworthy, and driven frantically in competition for passengers.

The police numbered seven commissioned officers and 361 NCOs, policemen, clerks, boatmen and sweepers, and resignations of experienced men left the force about 100 under strength. The 235 natus patrolled Manama and Muharraq in particular, 40 guarding the Royal Air Force. After several pay awards in recent years, a new policeman drew 152 rupees a month (£11) in wages and rations, the natur 119 rupees (£9). It was probable that pay was supplemented by engaging in practices they were supposed to be stamping out, such as opium smuggling.

I called at the Manama police station to seek a street direction and had trouble communicating with the man on the desk. Through an open door half a dozen others, in various stages of undress, came whooping out and joined in animated discussion. "Lazim taxi! Lazim taxi!" they cried. I stopped them rushing out to get a fleet of

taxi (for commission!) saying I didn't need one. Their chorus changed to "Baksheesh, bakshesh!" I left in a hurry. Baksheesh was a favourite greeting also from the natur on his beat.

On ceremonial occasions, the policemen in khaki shirts and shorts, with scarlet turbans, looked presentable: as bandsmen playing slow airs or mounties lined up like cavalry. Otherwise they could look pretty scruffy.

They were rather prone to sickness and disease and notched up 1,473 outpatient cases in a year. A footnote to a table of painful complaints in a hospital report, which drew attention to 1951's extreme weather, observed a conspicuous increase in septic conditions, malaria unchanged, respiratory disease doubled and worms halved. Venereal disease in the force attained the lowest ever figure, 46 cases against 147 the year before.

It was realised that a policeman might be happier with a wife and cash loans were made by the Government to help him acquire one. Many policemen and a lot of ordinary Bahrainis sought brides in Oman and the southern Gulf, where conditions and poverty were harsher and women in consequence cheaper. The bride price (paid by the groom to the bride's family) was around £112 in Oman compared with £225 in Bahrain.

Statistically, the law abiding nature of the Bahraini was self evident. A population exceeding 100,000 produced only 229 police prosecutions in Bahrain courts in 1950-51, compared with 318 the previous year. The 229 included 68 cases of theft, robbery and receiving, 58 of assault (one murder), 8 liquor and drugs and 31 traffic offences. The few locals punished for gambling were spared the summary justice of the police in a neighbouring state who burned down a house used as a card school, causing casualties. Violence lent colour to the crime figures. An orphan boy, aged ten, lacking the will to live, drank rat poison. He was put on probation for attempted suicide. An Arab youth chose an unusual method of stealing gold ear rings from small girls. He slit their ear lobes with a razor blade.

In the absence of a press to enable justice to be seen to be done, more interesting aspects of life never saw light of day. What a scoop the Islander might have had with the year's lone murder. The victim

was an Iraqi Christian goldsmith named Hanna Numaan, a notorious character who fled Baghdad to escape the family of a girl he had seduced. His disappearance from his office in Bahrain started a long police investigation. Another bad lot with considerable prison experience, Abdulla, a Bahraini, went to the police and said he had recently been to Baghdad with the wife of another ne'er-do-well, Abdul, and had seen Numaan there. But this was a red herring, for his body (identified by dental records) was lying in a shallow grave in the desert and revealed much later when exhumed by pye-dogs.

The police charged seven suspects in a murder committed during a quarrelsome bout of drinking. The cast, fit for a best selling Whodunit, included Abdul and Abdulla, two prostitutes, a procurer and liquor peddler named Khalil and a taxi driver who conveyed the body and grave diggers to the hiding place in the desert.

The Agency court for foreigners handled 84 cases in 1950-51, including 45 of theft, robbery, etc, one assault, 10 liquor and drugs, and 21 traffic, and the figures were used to demonstrate that the minority foreign community produced a higher proportion of criminals and bad motorists. But they also indicated a sharp decline from the war years, when the Allied military were present both to commit and detect crime.

The figures also threw up the disparity in sentencing policies which, it was contended, reflected the prevailing public opinion. Thus, an American in the Agency court was fined 110 rupees (a day or two's wages) for drunken assault, while a Bahraini in his own court got six months hard labour simply for being drunk.

Yet, according to Belgrave, Bahrainis got off lightly. He wrote, "Inveterate thieves spend the greater part of their lives in prison. On the mainland, such persons would be punished by the cutting off of their hands and finally by decapitation; but the punishments inflicted by Bahrain courts - whippings, fines and imprisonment - cause many of these people no hardship. Prison work is not hard, food is better than they could obtain for themselves and the only real punishment is being deprived of women." At the end of 1951 there were 55 men in custody.

The ambiguity that was Bahrain - the Bahrain of the myth makers and the actual Bahrain that people lived in - caught out even Charles Belgrave. He endorsed statistics to show that all was well, more or less, while admitting that facts and suspicions drew a different picture. For instance, how many babies, especially girls, were done away with? Belgrave had written in 1937, "It is possible that occasional murders, especially of women and newly born children, go undetected. There are still many Arabs in Hedd and Muharraq who feel justified in murdering female relations who bring shame on the family."

Bahrain's first census in 1941 revealed a population of 89,970, made up of 74,040 Bahrainis and 15,930 foreigners. There were 48,267 males and 41,703 females.

The 1950 census indicated a population of 109,650, of whom 91,179 were Bahrainis. Males numbered 58,601 and females 51,049, the difference put down to foreign men working in Bahrain without wives. But many Bahraini males, thought to number 6,000, were working abroad without their wives. The figures were highly suspicious. A register of births and deaths would have helped to clarify matters, but plans for a register were shelved because of alleged public opposition.

During the first census taking it was discovered that in a village of 248 souls, eight young children died in the space of ten days and there was no epidemic.

Vice offended Belgrave. He blamed the foreigners, prostitutes and those who patronised them, and the licentious military who came as protectors during the war. The youngsters with pale skins and bright red hair that I saw in the towns could have been Arab-Anglo-Saxons of wartime liaisons. But it was not all one way traffic. The shaikh had to act in 1951, following complaints, to stop Bahraini women taking off to Saudi Arabia for undisclosed business. He decreed they could only go with a male relation.

Immorality on a grander scale was profiteering by unscrupulous merchants, the majority of whom were regarded as foreigners, even where they had acquired Bahraini citizenship. At the start of the Korean war in 1950, they repeated what they had done in 1939 by hoarding essential foods and forcing up prices. Again the

Government responded by importing stocks of staples like rice, wheat and sugar and retailing them at controlled low prices. If love and money were satisfied, that left liquor as a key source of forbidden pleasure. More wicked aliens, Iraqis, Persians, Jews, were blamed for the setting up of illicit stills for production of the date spirit, arak, which was secreted in wells, gardens, false ceilings and out of the way places. Respectable people set up as distributors, including the lunatic asylum keeper. When this traffic was curtailed, a concoction of methylated spirit and eau de Cologne succeeded it.

Men in government and commerce had no need to bother with substitutes. The real thing, Scotch whisky, gin and brandy, could be obtained in subtle ways. A leading shaikh always kept a bottle in his fridge, explaining it was for foreign visitors. An English bootlegger working for Bapco, with accomplices, sold 8-rupee bottles of whisky for 50 rupees. The story went that company security men stopped his car as he raced across the desert with four or five dozen bottles of assorted spirits. Having made £1,300 profit which he calculated equalled six years' savings, he was happy to pay a £75 fine and get his fare paid home.

Dealing with local offenders who happened to be apprehended was quite another matter. To quote Belgrave again, from 1937, "The impartial administration of justice in the Bahrain courts is, in my opinion, the most difficult problem which is dealt with by the Government."

If justice was not rough, it was certainly rough and ready: law made on the hoof, so to say. A religious court had existed for two centuries, it was believed, but secular courts to deal with criminal and civil cases, commercial and pearl diving disputes and other special matters, were of fairly recent origin. Naturally, the framers of laws were the dispensers of justice, all relatives of the ruler, except Belgrave, and all the judges and magistrates were said to be illiterate, but this might have been malicious gossip. There were no jury trials.

Uncle Abdulla, the minister of education, was sole judge in the senior appeal court. Shaikh Daij bin Hamad (the ruler's brother) and Shaikh Ali bin Ahmed were senior court magistrates, four more Khalifas sat in the junior court, and another Shaikh Abdulla

presided over the commercial court. This family business had no recognised corpus of law. A bit of the Sudan penal code was sometimes consulted. Portions of Indian Code were introduced by Salim al Arayadh, court superintendent, a former headmaster who had worked in India and examined its legal system. Belgrave, son of a barrister, had taken a short course in law and was able to offer advice.

A day in court left me uncomprehending, except to gather that parties to a dispute could bring innumerable witnesses and family members to perjure themselves in the interests of justice. Al Arayadh insisted that reforms had much improved the system in recent years, and he had 14 clerks working under him.

In flawless English, he explained that the courts sat every day except Friday, hearing in a year about 2,500 cases, the majority relating to money, claims for commercial debts, rents and wages. The more interesting cases came before the religious courts, where the kadis, not the most honest of men, handled matrimonial and inheritance matters.

Giving me a lesson in sharia law, the superintendent said the Prophet Mohammed had laid down that divorce was permissible but not desirable. The sunni divorced his wife without recourse to authorities, but the shia husband had to go to the kadi.

This judge acted as a marriage guidance counsellor, urging the husband to reflect and come back in a fortnight. He would later give similar advice to the wife and by a process of procrastination delay decision for perhaps two or three months. If reconciliation was not then possible, the kadi would go to evening prayer in the mosque and declare for all to hear that the couple had decided to part. This meant the wife was divorced. She was given a certificate pronouncing her free. She could marry again after three months and ten days: time to determine whether she was pregnant or not. If expecting a child, the former husband had to take the child and bring it up.

Salim recounted a recent case in which an old man came to court to demand the return of his wife and restoration of full conjugal rights. The judge admitted that by law the wife must go home, but it could not force her into relations. He put it to the husband that,

morally and physically, he could not claim full rights. But the man protested that though he had been married 40 years his ardour was undiminished. Anyway his wife was strong.

The woman was produced. She was old and frail and bent. She told the kadi her husband was mad and had animal instincts. The law, however, had to take its course and she was taken, protesting, by car to her husband's house. As soon as his back was turned, she fled again to her relatives.

Salim reported with satisfaction that no executions had been carried out during his eight years as superintendent. Death by firing squad was public, but at an hour when few were stirring. And the longest sentence in his time was 12 years for concealment of a murder victim.

My last glimpse of law and order shortly before leaving Bahrain was through the gates of the police fort jail, where a number of manacled prisoners were working in the yard. Those with clinking chains from ankle to thigh were able to walk. Indeed, one man ran stiffly. But another, ankles linked by a two foot length of chain, could only stomp despairingly.

I SENSED a story when introduced in the club to a young Scot who had spent nearly a year in Bahrain as the state agricultural officer. John Edmond had worked on a large model farm in England after obtaining an agricultural diploma at university. As an ex-farm hand, I claimed to be a kindred spirit. He agreed to show me over his establishment and accepted there might be a story in it. I went on my day off.

The largest of his three farms was only 30 acres, in the coastal village of Budeya, west of Manama, and used for experiments and research. Everything was small scale, not least the new 7HP tractor no larger than a child's pedal car. Agriculture had declined in Bahrain over many years and the main crops were dates for human consumption and lucerne for animal feed, but Edmond had devised two six-year rotation schemes for barley, maize, millet, groundnuts, sorghum and potatoes. Most European vegetables, especially for salads, could be grown as amateur gardeners in Awali proved. The agricultural officer and his 50 local men were keen on building up livestock. A flock of Zebu sheep they had, along with double-humped cattle, and buying a local bull and six cows it was hoped would herald a milk supply that might become commercially viable.

I wrote a substantial account of the farm's activities and set it within the context of world food problems. McGregor was delighted and said it was a pity Brown was not here to read it. Edmond I had portrayed as a man devoted to his task and he readily approved the piece for publication. That was two hurdles cleared. The next was winning the approval of the senior government official GWR Smith, who was standing in for Belgrave, then on leave.

A few weeks passed and Edmond wrote to me to say the article would "have to be suspended" because it failed to gain the favour of the acting adviser who felt that "there is no objection to an article provided it is confined to facts." He (Edmond) now believed I had

been wrong on a morning "too work laden and hot" to ask him questions for an article which, by combining Bahrain's agriculture and world food shortages, could mislead readers.

Such flimsy objections could easily have been overcome. McGregor agreed with me, then added, "I'm not surprised at the opposition. Belgrave doesn't want any local stories to get out; he wants them for his own book."

I wrote to Edmond to solicit help on another article. Six weeks passed and then he replied, "Sorry I haven't managed to write sooner, but I am leaving Bahrain this evening and I've been very busy indeed." That was news that I had not expected, for he seemed happy in his work. Friends told me he had resigned because he had to live on the farm. Belgrave had denied him accommodation in Manama. An Arab contact told me, "The Government thought he was rather inexperienced..."

Edmond had written that I could pick up a copy of a long report he had compiled for his successor, but when I called at the farm some weeks later the clerk, one Ibrahim, said I would have to get in touch with the adviser. We were going round in a circle. Ibrahim let me see the introduction, in which Edmond stated that Bahrainis were conservative farmers and that wealthier people liked to own land and have a bit of a garden in which to take their ease, but they had no inclination to extend and cultivate it.

The new overseer, Soares, an Indian, said a few vegetable seedlings were just coming through (this was late October), no potatoes had been grown and the date crop was good. A score of black and white newborn lambs were penned with about 30 older dirty-yellow sheep. The dairy business had been established and was supplying milk to the government hospital. Six cows, a bull and two calves were kept in hygienic conditions and the cows were hand milked in a spotless parlour. I was impressed and felt I could write an account that none could take exception to.

I would say that the cows, fed on dried fish, lucerne, bran and dates and milked thrice daily, had a daily yield of between five and seven pounds per cow, and exceptionally 10 lbs. But I would have felt obliged to set some sort of perspective, to say that in the recent British Dairy Show, one cow gave over 100 lbs of milk in a day.

Such odious comparison might have misled my readers. I dropped the story.

October saw the first marked fall in temperature and a few drops of rain, the first since March. I wrote a few paragraphs for the Islander on the Conservatives winning the election at home, but it was so badly mauled that I tore it up. The management decided that each of its members would give me a subject for a story and I would follow it up. It was not a success. The acting general manager, Barkhurst, said he had a great idea for a story about a cat that had been around the camp for as long as anyone could remember. I asked his secretary to get some details from Barkhurst, and all I got was short shrift. She said he had five months' correspondence from New York to catch up with... so push off with this cat nonsense!

Came November and some people were wearing overcoats at the cinema. Flowers were blooming, pink oleanders everywhere, moistened by the humidity that hung like a fog after dawn. With cooler weather, sleep came easier. The band from HMS Mauritius kept a large crowd dancing in Awali till 1am.

I played in a trio for the Poppy Day dance to raise money for the Earl Haig Fund. The resident's wife, Lady Hay, presented prizes for novelty dances and the raffle and made a short speech in praise of Earl Haig. Wives who had misheard the introductions gasped, "Fancy that!" Lady Haig herself was with them.

A conference of medical experts in the Gulf - scores of British and American doctors working for shaikhdoms and oil companies - was held in Bahrain, most of the week in Awali. Surely there was a story: all those endemic diseases and scourges and how they were being fought. I asked my chief to get me an invitation to the conference. No, no, he said. Wait for someone to send in a report. So we waited, and learned nothing.

After months of speculation, expatriates' pay was raised. As a lower grade "unclassified," I was awarded £5, making £50 a month.

The weather made a concession to Christmas: it became cooler. Remarkably, one family found a pile of logs and on Christmas Day kept a fire burning lazily but cheerfully in an open grate.

On the Muslim sabbath, the last proper shopping day before Christmas, sunlit Manama was thronged with people of diverse races.

For some from Awali this was the annual pilgrimage to the capital, and they packed the company's free buses for the half-hour ride. A spirit was in the air that all could share. Arabs and Indians and other easterners who would normally seek shade from the forenoon sun now gathered in chattering groups in the market streets, and taxi drivers, ever the noisiest of people, stepped up the blare of their hooters. Americans and Europeans from different parts of the Gulf filled the department stores in quest of presents, pawing greetings cards, tins of chocolate, perfumes, toys and luxury goods, or they squeezed into the narrow lanes of the bazaar, peering into tiny hole-in-the-wall shops for native trinkets or something exotic. "Everything's very dear," said a housewife not long out from England. I could not agree. Lots of things were virtually duty free. She should have been happy with a cornucopia to choose from.

Christmas was not joy unconfined but attempts were made to create a seasonal atmosphere. The Awali mixed choir sang carols in the club, dining hall walls were hung with bunting and staff in the offices seemed in good, or better, humour. My drunken neighbour in the bunkhouse barged into my room and stayed for two hours drinking and making weird noises that were meant to be musical.

Pre-Christmas, December 22, came the storm. The day had been fine and the evening was pleasantly cool. Sitting at dinner, I heard rain pelting down, though I heard no wind. After half an hour, the rain eased. Dodging puddles, I strode briskly back to the bunkhouse. What a shambles was there! It happened about 8, said witnesses. A terrific wind whipped in from the desert and reached the bunkhouses at the instant that a vivid flash of lightning struck one then crossed the road to bounce off another. The roofed veranda of one house, some 150 ft long, was lifted bodily over the house and deposited in pieces over the other side. Half another veranda was ripped from its stout supports and blown away. A heavy beam sailed through a bedroom window, shafts of wood stuck like darts in timber walls and doors came off their hinges. Asbestos roofs took flight thirty feet or more, bringing down telephone and electricity cables on the way. Indoors all appeared to be undamaged, though lights were out for three hours while linesmen shinned poles and struggled in driving rain to restore the circuit.

Oblivious to the gale, the open air cinema carried on and a number of hardy souls sat through King Solomon's Mines to the end.

Heavy rain fell for most of the next day. Water penetrated roofs and walls and flowed under doors in office buildings and several houses and formed ponds on any low ground. Trees were uprooted. On the road to Manama, palm branch dwellings stood forlornly in rivers of rain.

It was Sunday and bespattered I went to church for a service of lessons and carols. That night, in my room, I sat busily sewing into the small hours, transforming an old pair of floral print curtains into my drag costume for the Christmas fancy dress ball.

On Christmas Eve, the day broke clear and the sun gleamed in an almost cloudless blue sky. But the wind was keen, reducing the temperature to its lowest since the previous winter. During the afternoon, the general manager and other senior Americans toured the offices to offer season's greetings (while we hastily hid our bottles of Scotch). That this was a season of goodwill there was no doubt, and I could not imagine that I had been singled out for invitations to dinners and parties. The two I accepted could not have been more different.

The first was more banquet than dinner. We numbered 14 in the large lounge-living room of the host's bungalow, four wives and ten men. The occasion had a chic that was new to me, for the women wore gowns and half the men evening suits that looked splendid in the glow of candlelight. At table, the cutlery shone and the glassware gleamed on crisp linen, and three waiters hired from the dining hall looked resplendently like bearers from the Viceroy's last durbar, clad in clinging white uniforms with crimson sashes and cummerbunds. Soup was served, followed by fresh prawns with salad and cherries sandwiched in tricoloured jelly. After the main course of turkey, ham and fresh vegetables, lights were lowered for the serving of Christmas pudding aglow with blue brandy flame. Much banter accompanied the meal and everyone was happy. There was coffee, then cigars, and champagne glasses were filled many times. Crackers were pulled, toasts drunk, and then the ladies retired, leaving the men to a story or two. These were all ordinary folk, no side to them. Where had they picked up this lavish style,

then? A movie maybe. The atmosphere moved me to write afterwards, "It will be long before I dine so well again among such convivial company."

There was, next, work to be done on my costume, into which, in my replete state, I had to be squeezed. I was going as Carmen Miranda, an impersonation that impressed me when I saw Tommy Trinder doing it in a wartime West End show. When I first assumed this guise, my mother, an expert machinist, turned out a trailing dress without flaws. My latest creation was rank amateurish, but it was agreed that a length of net curtaining for a sash and stars and spangles fastened over the cracks would fill the bill. While the men after dinner cut out bits of silver and coloured paper, the women, ignoring my protests that they were overdoing it (this was drag not transvestism!) set upon me with paint, powder, mascara, etc.

When we arrived at the club just before midnight, the lounge was jammed tight with revellers and full of noise. The three-piece band tried to make themselves heard and a few couples tried to dance before the parade and judging began. There were some good entrants in home made outfits, a Spanish señorita and escort, the Wolf and Red Riding Hood, a Too-old-at-Forty fairy and many others. It was perverse of the three judges to award second prize to a man who, with the flimsiest of make up, presented himself as Hitler. I did not want to be cheated of the first prize, so I clowned around and was duly declared winner and awarded a silver tankard and a bottle of champagne.

The hour was late, or early, when my party retired from the club, where a pair of pianists had kept us singing lustily. After a nightcap at our host's home, I got back to the bunkhouse at 5 o'clock.

Christmas Day lunch in the dining hall was Cornish pasties!

The club lounge offered a homely, pub atmosphere. An attractive young wife from the East End of London demonstrated her talents as a pianist and husky singer, and glass in hand we followed her in singing familiar songs. When our ranks had dwindled to five, we took a car on a tour of visiting. Scores of families held open house on Christmas Day and we made our first call on the general manager and his wife. The atmosphere was somewhat forbidding so we took one drink and moved on to a senior engineer's home where

one of the office girls was playing hostess, since the wife had upped and left months earlier. The place was clearly popular, some 30 visitors sitting or standing around, chatting in groups, munching nuts and cakes and chocolates, sipping drinks, smoking cigars.

Two calls later, we decided we had had enough, and we kept bumping into the same circulating visitors. The two-hour tour gave me a chance to meet people I knew only by reputation, but in the end it began to pall for everybody was trying - very trying - to be oh-so-polite.

I had a date at seven, Christmas Dinner with Fred and Molly and family, and I approached it with a twinge of apprehension. They were a good, happy family and, not to speak disrespectfully, rough and ready. There were four children, two in early teens and the youngest in a pram. Molly had a good singing voice, but it was not that which might attract attention; rather that summer or winter, whatever the time or place, you would expect to see her in a shrunken blue frock shorter than her pettitcoat. On Christmas Night, she looked no different.

We sat at table, Fred, two boys and two guests, while mother and daughter served. The cutlery was an array of oddments and none too sparkling, and the table cloth had lost the freshness of its last wash. We had paper serviettes and spare ones served as mats for steaming bowls of food. Fred carved the turkey and made a mess of it. As we took up potatoes and peas and sprouts, their bowls clung to the paper napkins which tore and hung like streamers when passed around. The meal, completed with tinned Christmas pudding and coffee, was wholesome and I was grateful.

After dinner, I handed round my small presents: two books, a clockwork motor, a rattle for the baby, a box of chocolates and some handkerchiefs. We played a few games until Fred had to go on midnight shift in the refinery. Fatigued, sated with victuals, I was conscious of a happy, whirling Christmas. Next morning, Boxing Day so called, would mean the office grindstone again.

Dispiriting. That was a word to describe the arrival of 1952 in Awali. The younger women and secretaries and nurses, escorted, took off for Manama to see out the old year. The wives who came to the club had a few dances and quietly evaporated before a recording

of Auld Lang Syne came over the loudspeaker. Experience had taught them that men separated from the wives they yearned for were not above mauling someone else's wife at the midnight hour. So the women slipped away, the men sat around in sullen knots finishing their drinks and a new year had begun.

That New Year's Day, a holiday, England beat Scotland 1-0 at football before a big crowd in Awali. Thereafter, events followed the season or the calendar. Before January was out the Scots hogged half the dining hall, partitioned off, to remember Burns with toasts and piper and all.

For a while, a few months, I mended my ways, forsaking the club and adopting abstemious habits. I even read a little. Cricket occupied some of my time, including games against the RAF at Muharraq. The airfield, civil and military, was remarkable, so naturally flat and though rock hard able like a sponge to soak up the rare but heavy rain. The ferocious shamaals were another matter, lasting for an hour or two or persisting on and off for nearly a week. Airmen's billets lost their corrugated iron roofs in one gale, and light aircraft made short unscheduled flights in another. One cricket match on the edge of the airfield was abandoned when the men at the wicket couldn't see the boundaries for sand and dust. It was not an ideal site for football and cricket with all the traffic, a giant York carrying a whole ship's crew of Lascars or an Aramco plane ferrying oil workers and tennis players to and from Arabia, and revving engines and whirring propellers making the ground shake and sand swirl.

Play paused once for a funeral. Not like the funeral in Awali, the only one I knew of, when the general manager's elderly father in law died while on a holiday visit. A service in Awali church was followed by burial in the Christian cemetery in Manama, all done with quiet dignity. The Muharraq funeral party which now approached, some 20 men and boys in threadbare Arab dress, some barefoot, performed no solemn march, but scurried as they trespassed on our cricket outfield, bound for a simple burial site. Under a black sheet, the deceased lay strapped to a flat board which four men carried at the corners. Leading was a boy carrying

domestic bits and pieces for the grave, and flies swarmed over the shrouded corpse.

On Wednesday, 6 February 1952, King George died. Did they close the pubs in England?

News travelled fast. The announcement in London was made at 10.45am, or 2.45pm Bahrain time. By 3 o'clock, few working for Bapco were unaware of the tidings. An edict was issued, whether by the ruler, the Foreign Office or head office in New York was not known, banning all entertainment forthwith. On the ruler's palaces, the Bahrain flag was flown at half mast. Two days of prohibition in Awali, without warning, stunned western workers and families. They received first intimation when they went to the cinema, club and library to find notices of closure. Grumbling was spontaneous. It was not possible to buy soap, cigarettes or drinks of any description or get a haircut. Wednesday was the night most men ordered their 'weekend' stock of alcohol and now the off licence was shut. American roughnecks, home after a day's drilling in the desert, were incensed by the terse explanation on a notice board in the bar: "Owing to the death of His Majesty the King, the bar will not open tonight."

One crashed his huge fist on the bar counter. "Jesus, what's that got to do with us? It's not our king!" Others agreed, continentals from Holland, France and Scandinavia among them. The contingent of British bar habitués were no less put out. Some sat down to bemoan their lot. Some got taxis into Manama, hoping to find life there. Others hoped they might find succour from workmates in family homes, where big fridges were usually stocked with liquor.

I was not alarmed. For three weeks I had taken scarcely a drink and participated in no jollification. Strangely, I had a party to attend that Wednesday. I went down to the bunkhouse to spruce up and waiting for me was my neighbour, Donaldson. On the occasions we bumped into one another, he never looked other than morose. Now he was cursing. His hands trembled, his face twitched. He needed his nightly fix and the bar was closed. "Haven't got a drink, have you?" I lied, "No."

He eyed me pathetically. "You sure, you must have some beer." "No beer," I replied. "But I've got some whisky." I fetched the bottle

I kept in my wardrobe to help me sleep, which it never did. It was half full. "You can have this, I don't need it."

He hesitated ungratefully. He would have preferred iced lager. But he took the bottle in his nervous fingers and shuffled back to his room. I imagined he had a quiet but not inconsolable night.

I went off to the party, where ten of us celebrated three birthdays. An excellent buffet supper included caviare and there was no shortage of drink. The royal demise was not a subject of conversation. We were not in mourning.

The day after, the management made a sudden and surprise decision to close down as much of the works as possible without interfering with production. Notices went up at 9.30 saying that all workers who could be spared would down tools at 10am. By the time it was established who could be spared, the lunch hour arrived. The commissary also closed early and a queue of stranded wives complained bitterly. And cancellation of a trip to Kuwait by our football team was another cause for anger.

So much for the West. What of the East? If reports were to be believed, millions and millions of simple folk were stricken with grief. Ramchandra, a typist in accounts, came to see me with a friend, a two-man delegation from the Indian community. They had a favour to ask. They revered the figure who, but a few years earlier, had been their King Emperor. Now he was dead, they wanted to pay a proper and solemn tribute. Could I advise on the form a ceremony might take and could I write out a suitable oration? I had to say I was sorry. I was bereft of ideas, except to suggest they consult with the Foreign Office people in Manama. They were, I believed, genuinely distressed.

On the second night of prohibition, I went to a party in Manama with a number of bachelors and married couples from Awali as guests of a British construction foreman. We drank and sang and briefly discussed the prospects of a woman on the throne and I made some remarks construed as political and so the subject had to be dropped.

Normal services resumed on Friday, our rest day. I joined the long queue at the barber's shop. Liquor flowed in the club where reigned a general air of whooping it up.

The King's funeral took place on the following Friday. The company decreed a day of mourning, but at least gave warning. The bunkhouses were well stocked with alcohol.

That night Awali was quiet as the grave, almost. In the vastness of the club only half a dozen lights burned, the terrace, billiard room and bar consigned to utter darkness. A handful of men sat in the reading room in a silence barely disturbed by the rustle of newsprint. The dining hall at least was animated by the contented consuming of steak and ice cream. Powerful lights which invariably at night illuminated the entire frontage of the commissary, throwing beams on the office block across the road, were turned off. The cinema was quiet and still and scarcely a soul appeared on the streets. A slight chill pierced the night air. It was eerie, uncanny.

A time came when New York sent felicitations and appointed me Bahrain correspondent for a new publication, Caltex Circle, being distributed to Caltex employees world wide. Credentials included a passport which entitled me to visit any installation in the oil empire more or less without let or hindrance. It did not impress Bapco's local management, who accepted it might be valid for Holland or Indonesia and all points between...but not for Bahrain!

Public relations was not the company's strong suit. There was a fear of saying something out of place, of upsetting the ruler or the British Government's representatives, so the management invented vapid and vacuous phrases to tickle the shaikh's vanity while maintaining a low profile of itself. I wondered what Bapco made of a film commissioned by the Kuwait Oil Company and screened publicly in Awali, a positive account of oil riches being put to work, of the surge in construction of hospitals, schools, power stations, water treatment plants and development on every hand, both state and company. In Bahrain, it was always claimed - making a virtue out of necessity - that a snail's pace was essential to orderly progress. The first issue of Caltex Circle gave pride of place to Bahrain and thousands were delivered to Bapco for distribution to all employees. Printed in English, it was a pointless exercise for most could not read in any language, so Arabs just threw their copies away.

Managerial musical chairs meant changes in Bapco. After leave, Brown resumed his seat as GM, Smith was promoted to a new post; McGregor was confirmed as chief accountant but earmarked for Australia, while Josephson was on his way to the Pacific as a refinery superintendent and his job as personnel superintendent passed to Denny Berdine, hitherto training chief. Lesser lights moved up one.

At the end of February 1952 I was told that Head Office chief accountant had ordered my transfer to personnel to relieve his department's budget of the Islander's production costs. My new boss, Berdine, was a huge American, around 40, ruggedly handsome and very smooth. Whether or not he knew it, he was less than affectionately known by various nicknames. One he might not have disowned, "The great white hunter," doubtless originated from a Big Game safari in darkest Africa with medical chief Biggar.

The winsome smile, the friendly manner (and his 15 year service pin) all conspired to earn steady promotion. As head of personnel he now had wide responsibilities, for housing, education and training, recruitment and promotion, travel, employee and family relations and other matters of personal wellbeing. He might have been the right man for the job, but he wouldn't have got my vote.

Berdine summed me up, as he reminded me from time to time, as "not having the right attitude." It wasn't just that I was not a good company man, but I wanted what I could not have - freedom. The difference between him and the accounts people, Smith and McGregor in particular, was that when they said No they meant No, whereas Berdine said Yes and meant No. An Arab described him as "a man of empty words."

At the meeting where McGregor handed me over to Berdine, like the baton in a relay race, I gave him some stick. The Scot was not pleased when I accused him of keeping me chained up, frustrating my ambition to be a news hound. With others, he had put the brake on the Islander so that no progress was evident during my first year, in contrast with the rapid strides made by The Kuwaiti and Aramco's Sun and Flare, with their professional printing and pictures. I enjoyed unburdening myself, the more so when Berdine interjected, "Yes, we must make changes." He became quite

enthusiastic as I unfolded plans for brightening up the paper. "Yes, that's a good idea...that's fine...Yes, why don't we do that?" He grinned like a big schoolboy.

I raised the question of Letters to the Editor, an essential requirement. McGregor said he had always been against the idea. Berdine asked why. McGregor hummed and hawed. I thought Berdine was about to side with me, then he said, "Of course, I agree that in their correspondence, the Sun and Flare publishes a lot of nonsense." So that was that. I could forget radical changes.

We turned to really serious matters. How much time could I devote to helping other departments, such as travel and housing? None, I suggested. And where could I sit? Berdine proposed giving me a small table in a partitioned corridor, but I persuaded him to let me share a room with others. It was not exactly an auspicious start to my year in personnel.

However, it was decided I could use my judgement on copy, referring only contentious matter to the censorship committee. But one issue later we were back to normal. A submitted biography on a foreman had slightly downgraded him and I had printed it in good faith and ignorance. Berdine said Brown was livid. We would have to revert to vetting of all copy.

These trivialities were becoming tiresome, I told Berdine. I was getting fed up with managers making mountains out of molehills. The smooth, smiling Berdine showed signs of irritation. "You have the wrong attitude," he said.

"Maybe, but if you rate me as a small time clerk without authority, you'll know what to expect!"

Too bad for Berdine. He had to placate the general manager and treat me with caution. I could have said, "I resign," leaving him with nobody to run the paper he had just taken over. He said I could call myself The Editor and put it on the front cover.

It was a bit of flattery, really, but I accepted it as a stepping stone. Berdine proved a constant bottleneck in production but he had too many other problems to worry about the Islander. He would sit on piles of copy for a week or items would be discovered at the bottom of his In tray. Deadlines were meaningless. A pattern emerged where I worked through a day and a night - a solid 24 hours - typing

stencils to meet the print time. Twice I rebelled and the paper came out 48 hours late. Brown, the GM, was furious. Memos flew. Berdine said it was my fault. I made sure the buck stopped where it belonged.

I was able to persuade Berdine to give or get me permission to visit the sharp end of operations, the refinery, wharves, rigs and so on. A few interesting things came to light, enough to win a memo from another velvety American supervisor, Bob Squires, dated July: "Brownie says your current issue of the Islander is best he's seen in a long, long time. Berdine agrees no need for a post mortem on this issue. Congratulations! Let's get hot on the next issue and see if we can catch another bouquet instead of the more common brickbats!"

I wondered where he got the "we" from. I was the one doing all the work. Perhaps Squires had just done JRT: "Pat the man on the back!" Still, I used his commendation to convince Berdine that if he put a car and the chauffeur Ali at my disposal, more journalistic plums might be harvested. As my hours had become irregular and I was denied overtime payment for nightwork, I fashioned my own shift system. Then, at last, I was able to get out and about: frequent trips to Manama to meet local personalities, Kanoos the travel agents, Jishy the headmaster, Al Bakr, editor of the Arabic language Voice of Bahrain, and others among the political elite who - by virtue of Bapco's ban on participation in local politics - I should have shunned.

Abdul Rahman Al Bakr introduced me to young James Belgrave who, among other things, was the London distributor of the Voice. I remembered McGregor's contention that Charles Belgrave opposed the idea of the Islander reporting Bahraini affairs, yet - now that I broached the subject - the adviser was happy to sanction it and permit the Government's annual reports to be quoted now that they were to be printed in Arabic and no longer marked Confidential. I found life becoming more interesting.

The Islander's make up was more interesting too. A Multilith machine, bought to print the vast outpouring of company manuals and office stationery, enabled the Islander to carry pictures. It still looked like a stapled collection of foolscap sheets but the photos were a transforming dimension.

In the meantime, I persisted with the idea of a Letters to the Editor column. Eventually, Berdine said, "OK, write a memo." I wrote a long memo, No 42, to John Gornall, supervisor of employee relations, spelling out the pros and cons. I was persuaded our readers were strongly in favour. I could not discover why such a column in the early days had lapsed. I suggested the rejection of anonymous, offensive or unduly critical letters, but I was adamant that - to eliminate any risk of victimisation by the management - I alone should know correspondents' identities.

Gornall commented: "There is always a danger, I suppose, of it becoming a means of criticising Company policy and airing moans, but as long as this is not too serious, I don't think it would matter." (After 15 years, Gornall was hardly likely to criticise!)

Berdine added, "Recommend trying a Letters column on basis that we edit it carefully."

He passed my memo to Brown, the man to take the desperate decision. He wrote: "Agree we should have a letter column. I suggest kick it off by printing a couple of letters and a note from Editor in respect to how he will accept same. Suggest one letter be on subject of Children at Cinema and other on 'Tattle Tale' grey at Laundry."

Well, well, after more than a year of pleading, I was pushing against an open door.

I wrote letters, over suitable pseudonyms, complaining about children misbehaving at film shows and the off-white state of linen after handling by the company's laundry. Sadly, the correspondence column produced a pathetic response and would have died had I not kept up a steady flow of my own, appropriately disguised. My letters were not strictly dishonest, in the sense that I articulated views that I picked up in conversation.

Coincidentally, another channel of communication was opened and my views on it were sought. "Great idea!" I told Berdine. It was Suggestion Boxes, to be placed at strategic points. The idea was not revolutionary, for many firms offered bonuses for suggestions which led to increased productivity, safety, etc. Bapco was not offering rewards, but it was surely inviting criticism. My suggestion was the first to be entertained: shelter for the little donkeys that Bahrainis

came to work on and tethered outside the refinery. They had always been left all day in the sun, and it took an ex-Abadan newcomer to notice it and mention it to me.

Al Bakr, the Manama editor, told me that he prompted Bapco's general manager to install the boxes. I had a feeling a lot of Arabs would be dropping in suggestions at Al Bakr's instigation.

One thing Bapco could hardly be faulted for was the catering. Mess halls and canteens served just over one million free meals in 1951, two-thirds to Europeans, at a cost of 424,000 US dollars. Meal times in Awali were a treat. In the dining hall for bachelors, tables were laid for four, with starched white linen and gleaming tableware. Indian and Persian waiters were busily attentive, the more so when treated civilly, the less when greeted with snarled demands. We lived like fighting cocks. The Goanese kitchen staff prepared good food with finesse and their curries - chicken or prawn - had a succulence that I never thereafter savoured.

Once during my time there was a lapse of some weeks when standards slipped. The daily fish course disappeared from the menu, poultry and fresh strawberries appeared other than as a matter of course. There was grumbling and muttering. Old timers could remember when American roughnecks, denied the mammoth steaks they were accustomed to, showed their contempt for the chow they were served by dropping platefuls with a crash to the floor.

Such unseemly behaviour was unnecessary now. Someone at midnight shift supper (the same as the breakfast menu) showed how to make a point. He tipped a plate of porridge and a grilled kipper into the dining hall suggestion box!

10 Tales of the cats

A TEST of civilisation is the way people treat dumb creatures, especially domestic pets. The love-hate relationship with dogs and their doings has inspired more than its share of space in newspaper correspondence columns.

Among Arabs, there appeared to be an ambivalent attitude to dogs. Some held them to be unclean, like women and swine not to be countenanced or even spoken of. On the other hand, shaikh and desert nomad alike boasted of his saluqi bitch, the swift hunter.

Dogs were banned in Awali. The towns were almost as free of them. But it was not unusual to see a wild dog bounding over the desert to hurl itself at a passing motor car and miraculously escape death. One dog that was untouchable lay dead by the roadside just outside the ruler's Rafaa palace and it stayed there a full week.

Cats were of another order, objects of affection or ill will according to their age and the disposition of their keepers, and stories that surfaced revealed the sentimental or base sides of human character. Barkhurst, the acting GM, never came up with his promised cat tale. Perhaps he had second thoughts, for a story I got second hand cast him in an unflattering light.

A mother and her litter of three were found in the vicinity of the 'cat cracker' (fluid catalytic cracking unit) and sympathetic operators adopted them. The refinery boss - it was either Brown or Barkhurst - ordered them to be destroyed. This was done but it left a nasty feeling for a long time. The camp cartoonist turned out drawings for pasting up in control rooms, one of an American with stetson and loud tie, and a large rifle, and his left boot trapping the game he had slaughtered, with the innocent kittens nearby. The caption, referring to the system of logging refinery activities, read: "And a copy was sent to New York."

Other cat stories came to light. Of one, I wrote: "The odd cat or two is found in the refinery serving the useful function of depleting

the numbers of meaner creatures. This cat (it didn't have a name) had crawled in from the desert. Half wild and emaciated, fur matted with oil and grime, such was its exhausted state that its hind legs buckled. There was an easy way to make final relief from suffering but those who found the wretch were reluctant to destroy. Then an operator took it in hand. Duly cleaned, and nourished with a meter man's carefully expropriated salmon sandwiches, it took on a more wholesome appearance.

"In good time, the cat regained strength and vigour and proved competent in the chase. And then, one fateful night, scampering into the path of a laboratory sample truck, the cat breathed its last. Some say the creature was buried with full honours, others that cremation took place. All agreed you could see the tears in its master's eyes."

The subject attracted people with convictions to pen Letters to the Editor. An amateur drama producer, Barbara Main, wrote in the *Islander*: "I was very glad to see a letter from a Cat Owner and Lover protesting against the callousness of a family in leaving a cat to fend for itself. I have had the same experience, but I had also to take on the responsibility of seeing that the cat was eventually 'put to sleep.' Some people have the mistaken idea that because a cat is an individualist, and of an independent nature, it can miraculously look after itself after having been given regular meals in its own home for maybe two or three years. This, of course, is quite ridiculous. Cats born in domesticity rely entirely on their owners for food. Deprived of food and affection, they become poor frightened creatures, obsessed with the idea of finding food in the struggle to exist. Many people who are guilty of thoughtless or deliberate cruelty to their pets do not realise that in an animal-conscious country like Britain, they could be prosecuted for the very acts which have no 'come back' in Awali.

"However, to hand over a cat to Sanitation Department is not, from my experience, always a happy solution. In my case, the cat arrived back at my door nine days after it had been handed over. Enquiries showed it had been taken to Manama and released. The poor animal found its way back to my house and was in a pitiful condition. It would be better if people, whose female cats have kittens, did not keep the whole family. The mother would be quite happy with one

kitten, and newly-born kittens suffer no misery if put to sleep at birth.

"Speaking generally, what happens is that the kittens are so sweet that the owner keeps them all, then, later, to get rid of them, gives them to anyone who will take them. Some people take them as pets for their children. This is commendable providing the parents are animal lovers and teach the children how to care for the kittens. More often than not, they are regarded as cheap toys for the children to push around as they wish. When past the endearing kitten stage, no one has any further use for them.

"It would be an excellent idea if the Bahrain Islander would publish the facilities which are provided for putting cats 'to sleep' when the owner either leaves the island or can find no one to look after their pet while on leave. If no gas chamber is available, I am sure there are sufficient interested people in Awali who would be willing to subscribe towards the purchase of one.

"To endeavour to prevent unnecessary suffering is, after all, just ordinary human kindness, whether one is or is not a cat lover," Mrs Main concluded.

For good measure, Mrs M A Ferguson wrote: "I should like to appeal to all owners of female cats in Awali to exercise the greatest care when finding homes for kittens. That someone is prepared to 'take them' is not enough, as proved by the number of poor stray animals so much in evidence.

"A kitten was brought to me a few days ago in a most shocking state of emaciation and misery. It cannot be more than 10 or 12 weeks old and was found in a hedge with a piece of wool tied tightly round its neck. It was little more than a skeleton. I have not tried to find the 'owners' as they are so obviously unfitted to keep any animal and appear to have no sense of their responsibilities as human beings. Such people are beneath contempt, but fortunately in Britain not beyond the power of the law."

Fighting talk! Bully for the wives who not only spoke out but identified themselves. Reaction from the management was required, not least to answer Mrs Main's plea for the Islander to publicise facilities for putting cats to sleep. It was not long in coming. A promulgation in the Islander, Notice to Cat Owners, warned:

"During the coming week Security Division will be shooting stray cats throughout Awali. Persons with pets are requested to keep them indoors between 7am-10am and 7pm-10pm."

The inability of cats - pets or strays - to read made them fair game. How many critters the gunmen in the streets bagged, the management never disclosed.

Rifle shooting was a pastime in Awali and Josephson was reckoned to be a crackshot. Weather permitting, competitive sport was entered into with gusto: archery, cricket, football, tennis, golf, hockey, squash, water polo, billiards, darts, shooting and, on rare occasions, softball when a makeshift team could be assembled to oppose a visiting US warship. Pitches were crude, devoid of grass or springy material, rock hard and roughly flattened by a bulldozer, then surfaced with a mixture of oil residue and sand. It was a wonder injuries were so few. Particularly among older men and wives at a loose end, golf was popular, and novices were quickly introduced to the finer points by young Arab caddies. Hazards were many, indeed interesting, as one drove from a tee on a high rock or sought holes behind the company's crematorium or beyond an Islamic graveyard. Swimming galas revealed considerable speed and stamina, and highboard diving by children was something to marvel at. Tennis was a minority sport, dominated by fierce-serving Aussies. Rivalry peaked in football and cricket. To beat the English was a special challenge. In these sports, competing Bapco departments played in good spirit, in like manner against the RAF and British firms and ships. As a modest bowler and a hopeless bat (though I did score the winning run in one tense match), I could only watch in awe the skill in Test matches between the cream of Awali Anglos and Indian and Pakistani employees.

A fine old English custom was the annual cricket match between the President's and Captain's XIs on the desert Oval. The ladies in bright print dresses sat in the shade of multi-coloured umbrellas in front of the oleander decked pavilion. Between play we tucked into a buffet lunch of salmon, cuts of roast beef and home made veal and ham pie, and apple tart and other delicacies, and later had cream teas. When stumps were drawn, the president, the long serving

hospital matron, Miss Henningham, invited us home for drinks and a couple of brief speeches. It was all very civilised.

Soccer was played for fun but in earnest, and traditions developed. On Christmas morning, Ireland played Wales. On New Year's Day, the entire Awali community crowded the touchlines to watch England and Scotland battle 35 minutes each way after the boss's wife, Mrs Brown, was introduced to the players and rewarded with a floral gift.

Football assumed serious proportions when it became international. The Awali Europeans, from overwhelming numbers and experience, produced sides which others could not equal. In fact, it was not unusual to find some opponents playing barefoot. Slowly, other ethnic clubs developed skills and moneyed people - merchants and possibly fringe members of the ruling family - started to take an interest. In support of their teams, Arab or Persian, a dozen or more, expensively dressed in a mixture of local and western clothes, pulled up at Awali's desert pitch in elegant cars. They were not necessarily young men and their role, spectating or passing on advice, was not clear. Some of these supporters were said to be paying players expenses.

Incidents began to occur, minor fouls or silly things which led to scuffles and pitch invasions. A game against the Persian Ferdousi Club was abandoned 20 minutes before time. In the semi-final of the Bahrain Championship (Bapco invariably won the cup), Awali beat Muharraq Sports Club 4-1, the result standing after the referee whistled five minutes early because of trouble. The Arab press tried to exploit the situation and one paper left a blank space in a football column with the explanation "Cut by censor." As a conciliatory gesture, Bapco and Muharraq played a friendly. The teams swapped forward lines and drew 2-2.

Perhaps the wealthy spectators with the flash cars and the players with no boots had a dream of Bahrain one day with a super stadium, world class football and England's manager, Don Revie, coaching Bahrain's national team. Truly, it came to pass. The many leisure pursuits in Awali came under the aegis of the Bapco Club board of trustees. In earlier times an elected committee of members ran the club before the company substituted a board of trustees made up of

elected (and management endorsed) members and company representatives. In April, 1952, this too was wound up. Briefly seconded to a successor body, a recreational advisory committee, as secretary, I was able to observe Bapco's attitude to the ballot box - if you don't like its verdict, ignore it.

A minute of the previous meeting said, "The chairman informed the meeting that local Bapco management had selected S Oakley and A J West from the nominations put forward. Mr P C Hall proposed Management be requested to indicate reasons for choosing the two men who recorded the lowest votes. Mr W Newton supported Mr Hall. Mr K Wilson pointed out that only one unmarried member remained on the Board. Following a lengthy discussion, Mr Wilson suggested any question raised with Management on this matter would be invidious. Mr Newton proposed the question be raised without prejudice. Agreed no action be taken."

I wondered why questioning management "would be invidious." Did fear come into it? As it was, this minute came under management scrutiny; so the point was made, if not taken.

The reason for the change was not explained to me. It was just possible the management envisaged a time when a majority of members might be non-Europeans. The five rupees a month membership fee ceased.

If greater company involvement in club affairs hastened desirable improvements to facilities, that would be to the good. Capital would be required for building the cinema and sportsmen's changing rooms, for example; exceeding the subsidies provided by those members who put most into the club and took least out - meaning the heavy drinkers who shunned sport and recreation but paid an exorbitant price for their liquor.

The new arrangements might have been for the best, but when the company's spokesman told the elected trustees that the management would decide the composition of the new committee, the last vestige of democratic control was snatched from men (no women) who had sacrificed part of their own leisure for modest perks.

Manama's showpiece club, the Ahli, was having personality clashes as well. HH Shaikh Sulman made a handsome financial

contribution, as did Bapco and the business community. All were represented at the grand opening. Al Bakr, guide on my clubland tour, said he was boycotting the Ahli opening because a Jew had been admitted to membership. One of the Wazzan shopkeeping brothers said he wasn't going either because he couldn't stand the merchant Kanoos, who were going. Al Bakr said the Kanoos were trying to bend people to their will. I mentioned the Kanoos to Pinhey at the Ahli. "Ah, yes," he said, "the Khalifas hate the Kanoos, for getting on too well too quickly." The club for the elite could have had a happier start.

The Kanoos had certainly got on. And I got on all right with them. I made them one of my contacts for stories and whenever I visited their offices in the main shopping street in Manama, they always plied me with coffee. The brothers, Mohammed and Ahmed, were around my age and shrewd businessmen, always two or three steps ahead of the mercantile community. Others became agents for foreign manufacturers and wholesalers. The Kanoos, once prominent in pearling, went for services: shipping, air transport, travel and insurance. They travelled widely to drum up business and seemed to think well of themselves.

Their private offices were like small clubs. The first time I called on Ahmed, the chubby younger brother with owlsh glasses, he was holding court with a number of merchants and shaikhs at ease on sofas. He did something novel in the 1950 Manama council elections by touting for votes with a loudspeaker van and was one of several young men elected. The Kanoos had fingers in numerous pies and in various offices employed hundreds of men and women, Bahrainis, Indians, Britons, other Europeans and Australians. Seeking opinions, I found them diplomatic or cagey.

I asked Mohammed what he thought of Belgrave. "Sir Charles is a good man. We all like him and his wife and son. Ask anybody, merchant or coolie. They will all agree, he is a fine man, tactful and diplomatic and never angry. When you go to him with a problem, he is patient, and you come away feeling satisfied." Belgrave had arrived in hard times and patiently set wheels in motion, so everybody in Bahrain was happy.

What about His Highness? "Everybody likes him," Mohammed replied. "He will see any of his subjects, and he seeks advice from a few merchants." Needless to say, the Kanoos among them.

When I went on a fortnight's mid-contract leave, Kanoos booked my passage to India. During an instructive stay in Bombay, I joined in a satyagraha over the price of bread. Thousands of ragged men and women marched with makeshift banners and shouted slogans. They surrounded a flour mill and tried to invade it, while police beat them off with their lathis.

The middle class leaders, elderly men in tight white suits and Congress caps and dignified sari-clad women, were arrested. When taken to court to be charged they made speeches on the steps and gave me an English statement of their demands and urged me to get it published. As I busily snapped away with my camera, they might have thought I was a pressman. "Thank you very much, sir," said a spokesman. The leaders chose 15 days in jail rather than pay 15-rupee fines; and next day the Government reduced the price of flour.

Back in Awali, I had four rolls of Bombay films for processing in Manama. "Let me do them," said a teacher from the European primary school. He was a fresh faced young man, always difficult to shake off when he offered to do favours. He seemed a competent photographer, but only reluctantly did I suggest he take two of my films.

"No, all four, I'll do them tomorrow," he insisted.

That was in June. In July he told me he had got as far as developing two rolls and would print them shortly. In August I learned he was going to England on leave, to marry, rumour had it. Fearing he might not return, I asked for the films the day before he left. He promised to bring them to me the following day.

The blighter gave me the slip, however, and left for England. He came back but whenever he caught sight of me in Awali he hurried away. I was becoming extremely annoyed. I was convinced he had either ruined my films or had not touched them. I dropped a note in his mailbox in September, demanding their return within two days. The deadline passed. I gave him two more days with a threat of taking certain steps. The new deadline was Saturday, and that night I grabbed him at the club. He told me to call the following night to

collect them. Nothing doing, I told him. I wanted my films now, immediately, and I would go home with him to get them.

He sipped his drink slowly, obviously hoping I would give up and go away. At midnight he went home, I with him. In his room he made some play of trying to find my pictures among heaps lying about. Then he said he remembered: my photos were in his classroom. He would get them for me tomorrow. Having come so far, I was in no mood to yield. Despite the hour, I insisted that we visit the school. There he fiddled with his key, but was unable to unlock classroom 5. He said he must have brought the wrong key. It was the right key, all right. But wrong door. I discovered later that he taught in classroom 4.

I had to give up, but the teacher promised to bring them at noon the following day. He telephoned at noon to say he would bring them in an hour. The hour passed. And another. I went to his quarters and rapped on the door, obtaining no answer. I turned the handle and the door opened. The teacher was not there, but little heaps of photographic materials were. From a sideboard I picked up the topmost of a pile of cut negatives, held it up to the light and beheld nude figures. Well, well, was our photographer the camp pornographer as well? The pose was one of a set - nobody I could recognise - and I was tempted to remove them to use as a bargaining counter. But that might have complicated matters. Exasperated I went instead to Security for help. They said there wasn't much they could do, but perhaps a visit from a policeman might scare him.

The following evening, my tormentor phoned to say my films were ready. I rushed to his quarters. Three rolls were drying on a line, the fourth was undeveloped. Angry, I snatched them all up and rushed out...and ruined the shots of the Bombay demonstration.

This charade had lasted four months. The teacher offered no explanation or apology. Was he a thief who hoped I would forget?

One thing became clear: he was a compulsive liar. He regaled mixed company with a graphic tale of derring do, how he was dropped behind the Nazi lines in Yugoslavia and created mayhem by his cunning and courage. Queer, I thought, he didn't look old enough to have been in the war. Then it dawned on me. His gallant

exploits were a replay of a Hollywood epic screened in Awali some months before!

In the 1952 New Year's Honours, the last in King George's reign, the ruler and the resident were awarded the KCMG to complement knighthoods they already had. The new Queen Elizabeth soon after knighted Charles Belgrave.

The Godaybia Palace in Manama on a fine sunny morning provided a splendid setting for the presentation to Shaikh Sulman. He in his peacock colours with gold sword and dagger, the resident and the political agent in swallow tail coats and cocked hats, and Belgrave in his tight grey Ascot rig out as key performers did a perfunctory inspection of the police guard and then waddled up the red carpeted stairs to the long rectangular throne room or hall of mirrors. Therein waited a full assembly, quietly expectant. On one side of a central aisle sat rows of the ruler's kin, uncles and lesser shaikhs in robes of light tan trimmed with gold, a fine band of bearded ruffians. On the other side were ranked the sober suited British elect.

The ceremony was brief. Two short speeches in Arabic were made by officials and then the resident, Hay, offered the KCMG decoration on a crimson satin cushion to the adviser, Belgrave, who took it and fastened the long red and blue ribbon round the ruler's neck. The ruler was his customary impassive self, moving not a muscle nor blinking an eyelid even as a trio of obtrusive photographers exploded flash bulbs in his face.

Scarlet robed servants poured scented coffee and then everyone rose to form a queue to shake the ruler's hand. I stood back, observing the mirrored hall's indifferent furnishings, the cheap electric chandeliers, unflattering portraits of His Highness on the walls, the weird assortment of carpets and the odd collection of small photos of the British royal family and UK Government ministers and generals in cheap frames lining shelves.

Beside me, Jack Robinson, Bapco photographer, was capturing the scene. We waited for the crowd to disperse and then two palace servants hurried towards us, holding out two 100-rupee notes...with the ruler's compliments. It was embarrassing. I protested, "We can't

accept." Jack agreed. The servants went through the "His Highness will be offended" routine. We took the baksheesh and left.

Eradication of slavery, an avowed mission of the Royal Navy from the start of its intervention in Gulf affairs, was a task unfinished by the mid 20th century. Yet it was not considered a critical issue. A story was told of the old slave who went into a towering rage when informed that the document he treasured as his passport to slavery was in fact a manumission certificate. He believed he was still bound to a master who would feed him to the end of his days. Freedom equalled insecurity.

I understood that the only slaves in Bahrain, of African origin, were 'voluntary,' working for the ruler with freedom for the asking. Though supposedly contrary to Koranic teaching, buying and selling of slaves persisted in Saudi Arabia but was fast dying out, while in Qatar, in that very year 1952, the ruler had outlawed slavery and offered owners £100 for each slave freed.

The transport sensation of the decade came to Bahrain in July 1952. It was the Comet jet, British Overseas Airways' new star, not yet in service but brought to Bahrain to make two demonstration flights. Putting all the eggs in one basket - the whole governing elite on one flight - might have tempted fate, but BOAC got round that by splitting the clutch into two. The ruler, his adviser, the resident and Bapco's GM kept their feet on the ground, but the rest of the cream of government and industry, leading Khalifas and merchants and oil chiefs from Arabia formed two passenger lists of 36 for the 90-minute return flight to Kuwait Town. Soaring to nearly 40,000 ft, thrusting almost noiselessly through a cloudless sky of impenetrable deep blue, the Comet contrasted remarkably with the old boneshaking piston-engined aircraft. The test everybody applied, successfully, was standing a coin on edge on a cabin table and defying it to fall flat travelling at 500 mph.

BOAC's local manager, Geoffrey Parker, was highly delighted with my report for the Islander and sent copies round the globe. I put together a series of short quotes from merchants and Bapco people which legitimately praised a British invention. Churlishly, the American Dr Biggar complained because I quoted him, accurately, as saying that he thought the Comet was "a good deal!" As the

Comet represented the most modern in our columns, so Mohammed bin Jassim al Qassab was the most ancient. If you believed Bill Mawdsley, he was 130 years old and still going strong. I wondered whether Mawdsley was testing the management's gullibility, knowing that they vetted Islander copy, when he submitted his translation of 'A Bahraini Centenarian,' an article in Voice of Bahrain by Yusuf Zubari, a Bapco prep school teacher.

By accident or design, Mawdsley assumed the role of amiable eccentric, subtly humorous, inclined in certain company to hold aloof. He had a marked disinclination to dress properly, meaning that his shirts were usually frayed and buttonless and his tropical trousers betrayed splits. A woman's touch was plainly lacking. It was said, though not often, because such a human condition was rarely a subject for discussion in Awali, that Bill was divorced. He was a bit above average age, firmly built, and employed as supervisor of education, overseeing the European primary school and Bapco's prep school for Bahraini employees.

Buttons and splits apart, Mawdsley had the manner of a gent. He had been a wartime officer in the Army, there learning Arabic, and he could converse with Arabs without condescension or rudeness. While numerous pianists could pound out the Roll Out the Barrel genre, he inclined to the other classics and crept into the club lounge at off peak times to brush up his Schubert or Chopin or practise pieces he would play at the children's ballet in Manama.

He was an enthusiast for education. Over his last three months in Awali, he took a Sunday evening class in Arabic script, a course which attracted only six students and which I abandoned as too difficult after three lessons. He allowed no backsliding. In the Arab school, he turfed out any youths who failed to pay attention or played truant or played cards. By striking them off the prep school roll, he fell foul of the management because he reduced the higher enrolment statistics which were produced to impress distinguished visitors.

The centenarian's tale purported to be an interview with Mohammed al Qassab, who claimed he could remember witnessing the fight between Khalifa brothers 90 years earlier, when Shaikh Ali was slain and Shaikh Mohammed became ruler. He was still

working more than ten hours a day, tilling the soil, and he walked from his coastal village of Yesra to Manama and back (26 miles) without trouble. The old man's tale bore the stamp of fable, but the scribe kept a straight face when repeating details from a phenomenal memory.

"See that spreading palm tree, towering sixty feet? I planted that as a date stone when I was aged about 38. I climb it every day to pick fresh dates and nobody else of my household has the hardihood to climb it!"

Wizened Mohammed was both frail and tough, though not always well; dignified in his cheap cotton gown; a repository of homespun philosophy. His longevity, his 130 years, he ascribed to a tranquil mind and a settled disposition emanating from a regular breakfast of 'gruel' concocted from flour, egg and ghee. Intimates swore he could eat four pounds of meat and two pounds of rice at a sitting, and any amount of fat heaped on his plate.

A likely story! It was awarded two pages in the Islander.

Mawdsley left Bapco after five years. Months later, after leave, he turned up in Manama, allegedly now a lawyer with ambitions. Only Bahraini nationals were allowed to practise law, on payment of 10 rupees for an annual licence, about the same as for a radio licence. However, a young British solicitor named Ballantyne arrived just before Mawdsley to set up an office. His father, a London solicitor, had conducted the tricky negotiations for Standard California which secured the Bahrain oil concession. Now the son was to represent banking interests.

I met Bill Mawdsley from time to time in Manama. Most people seemed to. His progress through the bazaar was slow for every few yards he would be stopped by a merchant, shaikh or beggar. Everybody wanted to shake hands and chat to cheery Sahib Mawdsley. He had changed little. Now his buttons were intact and he wore a tailored tropical suit, but the shirt was work soiled as ever. Legends arose. He had a post in the political agency; he took on Ballantyne in court and beat him; he had a flourishing freelance practice. If that were true, why was he living in Bastaki's third rate Bahrain Hotel, the lesser of Manama's two flop houses, and not in one of the posh flats spreading through the capital? Well, the flats

were expensive and landlords were afraid to let to Mawdsley in case he took them to court for rackrenting. Plausible, but doubtless untrue.

I may have misjudged my compatriots by believing they knew next to nothing about Bahrain and cared even less. Some gave the impression that simply setting foot there was adventure enough and that striking out across trackless desert, stumbling for miles and hours in search of some crumbling village meant wasting a good rest day. Exploring required effort but it was rewarding if only for the photographic opportunities. Character and colour abounded in diverse ways, in quaint craft shops and boatyards, in noisy, smelly markets, in mud walled villages, around spring fed pools and on idyllic islets.

Muharraq, island and town of 25,000 inhabitants, ranked second in the state, containing the homes of many of the wealthy and influential. It was an earlier capital and centre of the pearling trade and boasted few signs of modernity, excluding the newest examples of aviation genius at the airport and the ranks of gleaming taxis alongside the tumbledown market place. It was more genuinely Arab in its residents, merchants, boatbuilders and craftsmen and sellers of carpets and inlaid chests; and haggling over prices was permissible in the bazaar.

Near the waterfront, where hillocks of coral and rock stood ready to form a new, reclaimed shoreline, the main market was like a jungle clearing, unpaved and beset by garbage and flies. Rough poles supported old bits of corrugated iron sheet and matting, a roof casting shadow on bales of lucerne and fruit stalls. While radios blared throbbing music, men lolling on numerous coffee shop benches smoked their intricate pipes or waited for a shave or haircut. As a few baskets of fresh-caught crabs were brought to the stone fish slabs, crowds surged round looking for a bargain.

Muharraq was a maze of narrow streets and twisting alleys, where outstretched arms easily touched the crude walls of tall houses on either side. Grime and putrid matter were much in evidence.

An all encompassing view of the country without boarding an aircraft was obtained from the peak of the central Mountain of Smoke (Jebel Dukhan), an unhazardous 450ft climb which

dislodged tinkling fragments of flint and shale underfoot. The nearest features, twin humps, were translated from the Arabic as The Pomegranates, or, in colloquial English, Cleopatra's Breasts.

Westward lay three forbidden islands: Jedda, the rocky penal colony, where convicts worked the jet fields; Umm Saban, gifted to Max Thornburg; and Umm Nasan, the ruler's Pleasure Island.

Off the east coast, Sitra was the dominant island, a hub of industry where oil was stored, drums made and tankers loaded, while the nearby tiny island of Nabbi Saleh was pure romance.

We made a day's outing to Nabbi Saleh, 24 of us organised by the pony club. Many more had put their names down for the excursion but the Friday morning hangover defeated them. With our hampers of food and drink, we took the long way round from Awali, the bus to Muharraq and then an hour by launch to the island. In the shade of canvas awnings aboard and fanned by a steady breeze, none could complain of August's unbearable heat. Brilliant sunshine and a vaguely choppy sea left untroubled the big black cormorants parked on buoys and marine signposts. Berthing in shallows, we met ashore plantations of tall, well tended palm trees hung heavy with plump dates, a few green, many yellow, but most turned dark brown for harvesting.

Through a stone built village, we reached a clearing where lay a capacious pool fed by a fresh water spring. Other parties had preceded us, local residents splashed in the pool or lay beneath awnings stretched between trees, with radios and cooking vessels in action. Lesser pools and irrigation channels supplied ceaseless succour to luxuriant vegetation. We took our lunch on a neat sea wall above ruffled shallows that offered pleasant bathing. At a walking distance in the sea, a honeycombed hump of coral wore a deep salt crust.

We were a merry band of men and women, led by Dennis Wells, from the ill fated casino period, and we vented our feelings with suitable choral music on the bus back home. Why didn't we do this more often?

If oil was the making of 20th century Bahrain, it was water that made it originally. Though not abundant, sweet (potable) water from springs on and off shore and brackish water from wells sustained a

level of life that neighbours envied. Water meant life for fruit and flowers and animals and all brought together created picturesque and beautiful scenes.

Major pools had geographical names but to English speakers they were the Secret Pool, the Virgin's Pool or Belgrave's Folly. Another, the Dhobis' Pool on the road between Awali and Manama, was a palm fringed watercourse where Indian washermen planted their feet in the stream and gave huge mounds of soiled linen a good thrashing on smooth worn rocks before hanging out on acres of drying lines.

Belgrave's Folly was not an official description, the adviser nonetheless claiming credit for the design and landscaping, in the manner of some latter day Capability Brown. The pool, too cool in March for swimming, was home to multi-hued fish, about some 18 inches, which moved lazily among shoals of inch-long minnows. Among weeds and rocks at the water's edge, small ungainly turtles floundered, occasionally raising an ugly head before submerging again. In the adjoining gardens, shrubs and flowers were in full bloom. The Arab gardener, familiar with English names, pointed out nasturtiums, larkspur, begonias, wallflowers and many border species besides tropical climbing plants, red Bougainvillea, papaya and a small grape vine. He made up small posies for women visitors and directed photographers to the most photogenic spots, for either favour not loth to accept a gratuity. The blossom I most admired, a single pink-tipped rose, had quite the most delightful aroma I had smelled for a whole year.

The Secret Pool, four miles from Awali, nestling between ranks of stately palms and a gently shelving sea beach, provided depth for swimming in waters shared with donkeys brought down by Arab boys for a bath. One brayed and they all brayed with a noise that deafened.

Against the lush greenness of northern parts, the habitat of many bird and animal species, inland villages such as Rafaa presented a harsh contrast. The ruler's white walled palace at West Rafaa shared the desert with flocks of sheep and goats. At East Rafaa, where a leading shaikh maintained a crumbling castle within extensive walls on the edge of a rugged escarpment, a few thousand people

inhabited the stark straggling village where stone houses and barasti huts struggled to stand up. A bomb might have left less of a mess. Yet outside a hovel on a cart track where unwashed ragged urchins played, a donkey's tethering space was occupied by the newest limousine from Detroit.

Here obtaining gasoline from a pump was effortless compared with raising water from a Bapco-made well of impressive proportions, its mouth ten or twelve ft wide but the water's surface some 100 ft down. At simpler wells, a shadoof, a pole with a bucket and counterpoise, worked like a see-saw. The Rafaa well had two pulleys overhead and two ropes with a goatskin bag on one end and a donkey attached to the other. The bags dropped down the well were raised by the animals which plodded the length of a deep trench. The water won was then released into a stone trough for siphoning off into other goatskins. Black robed wives, having exhausted their gossip at the well, unhitched their donkeys - two operating side by side - overloaded them with skin containers and made tracks for home, either to use or sell the water.

Bahrain's traditions included two weekly open air markets, the Wednesday Market in a Manama square and the Thursday Market, Suq al Khamis, alongside the twin minarets of an ancient mosque. Thursday morning brought a large assembly of donkeys, white for pedigree stock. Not the most handsome of creatures but valuable as carriers of man and wares, those for sale were neatly groomed, their tails, manes and pasterns tinted with henna.

Far outnumbering veiled women, men squatted on the ground and shared a pipe or wandered and talked. Boys from the nearby primary school slipped out during their break, mingling with customers, buying a few grapes or a pomegranate and listening out for the school bell. Canvas awnings stretched over stalls kept the baking sun off sheep heads and green vegetables and sticky sweets. Among goods for sale were spices, fabrics, clocks, leaf tobacco from Dubai, and goats and donkeys and lucerne to feed them. The itinerant barber propped his bicycle against a wall, and in the shade crouched on his heels while a client sat on the dusty earth. An application of soapy water on the scalp and a few quick scrapes with an open razor and - presto! - a hairless crown.

Before noon, business ceased. Sellers packed their wares, buyers departed, balancing bundles on their heads, and donkeys laden with lucerne and packages went their various ways. The site returned to empty desert.

Modern technology in oil operations threw into relief the simple craftsmanship of native industry. A pearl diver was fully equipped with a rope, a knife and nose clip. Bapco's British divers, Bob Asplin, John Atkinson and Ken Willson, went down in 250 lb suits and carried electric-arc and oxygen equipment with cutting and welding tools when they worked on the submarine pipeline which carried oil from Al Khobar in Arabia for refining.

In Manama, old and new worked cheek by jowl. In his tiny, open workshop, a bearded craftsman sat crosslegged before an anvil, fashioning exquisite silver filigree. Welding gold, he needed a blue flame which he got by inserting a bent metal tube into his mouth and blowing into a piece of tallow burning in a dish.

In a narrow lane of blacksmiths, men and young boys laboured in virtual darkness, low matting roofs blotting out sun and daylight as they made bolt nails and simple objects. Each forge had two sunken oil drums - one for the smith to stand in, the other for the fire - and the anvil at ground level stood between them. A long pole worked the bellows which forced a draught along a clay tunnel to the furnace. Scrap and metal lay in twisted heaps and a black grime coated everything, including the workmen's bodies. What looked like goggles on the children's sooty faces were rings rubbed with watering from their eyes.

Nearby, in a dingy workshop, Arab mechanics were overhauling a modern motor vehicle.

Fishing was both art and craft, the methods of catching and trapping requiring skill and guile. It was fascinating watching a weighted net thrown with a whirl so that it landed in a wide circle on shallow water.

Kuwait, reputedly, was the place for boat building, especially of ocean going cargo carriers. If Bahrain's wooden hulls were on a lesser scale, they were hardly less remarkable. How a heap of assorted timber, twisted tree trunks, boards both sound and split, took on the shape of rowing boats, lighters for ferrying passengers

and cargo from deep sea ships to shore, lateen rigged dhows and vessels formidable as galleons was a source of wonder.

A boxed model kit at least contains a drawing and pieces moulded and cut to size. Builders of real timber boats needed no plans or orderly shipyard. A length of stout Indian teak laid on the beach formed the keel and from there the constructor worked his way up. Ribs of no uniform length or curve somehow enabled the hull boards to be nailed on in a symmetrical sweep from stem to stern.

Materials and tools could not have been simpler: string, nails, hammer, adze, saw and a brace made from a bow with a loop in the string to hold the drill bit. A paste of fish oil and lime rubbed in acted as a preservative on craft that were eminently seaworthy.

11 A new deal

I COULDN'T SAY I got on very well with Berdine. Perhaps I did not want to. The natural charm a few saw in him was an unctuous manner that grated on a lot of others. If you phoned him you got a cheery, "Berdine here, good morning, how are you?" If you rang a few moments later to check a point, before getting a chance to speak you heard, "Berdine here, good morning, how are you?"

A muscular hulk, he was all-American. But the Irish in his name conveyed more than a hint of blarney. A journalist who interviewed him for *The New Yorker* wrote about "Dennis Monaghan Berdine, in whose voice creeps a note of reverence when speaking of the Company... He springs to attention at mention of the Company as a Coldstream Guardsman does at mention of the Queen."

He gave me a lot of soft soap early on: Mr Mapp this and Mr Mapp that. That was before I became Burt, the American spelling. I was in the office one night, typing my private correspondence, Berdine came in. When he saw what I was doing, he said he was all behind with his personal mail. "D'you think you could help me out, Burt?" The audacity of the man! I said I was too busy; anyway 48 hours work in a week was enough.

My declining to accommodate him could have no adverse effect on my record. But the tiffs we had from time to time surely counted as black marks for my personal file. Minor employees were under surveillance, whether aware of it or not. Be careful, the girl in personnel records had warned me. But being watched was done with good intent when part of the "Appraisal and Development Plan to assist the employee in his growth and development."

This Plan, no doubt drawn up by an eminent industrial psychologist, superseded the Rating System and was due to come in as I was going out. It reminded me of the self assessment questionnaires designed to titillate newspaper readers and inflate or deflate egos. The difference with this scheme was its serious purpose

and the perspicacity of the appraiser. The drama played out on a single sheet of paper might determine a whole future career.

Each employee's worth - all the thousands of them - was to be assayed periodically by his or her immediate superior. (Equity might have suggested reversing the traffic too.)

To be fair, the subject of the exercise was to be allowed to enter into discussion on his superior's findings and encouraged either to seek other employment or undergo such training as would develop his potential and enhance his career prospects in Bapco. Very laudable and nicely put!

Under this plan, the whole being was analysed to reveal quality and quantity of work done, skill, initiative, leadership, etc. For supervisory grades, 13 attributes had to be examined, for non-supervisory 8, each qualified by five sub-characteristics. The personality of the ordinary worker had to be judged on "Ability to get along with fellow workers and others, ie tact, co-operation, manner of speech, disposition, sincerity, thoughtfulness and consideration." Manner of speech and consideration did not feature in supervisors' qualifications.

Subjected to these criteria, some in the hierarchy might have deserved to be displaced. But never mind. Best laid plans could be modified by tried virtues, such as time serving, flattery, and a nod and a wink.

A method of dubious subtlety to win friends in high places and earn preferment was demonstrated by Amer, the youngster with an aptitude for English and office work, the young man who took our party out to the pearling fleet.

Marked changes came to the Gulf in 1952. A year after the oil companies had conceded half-profit windfalls to the rulers, managements were compelled to speed up programmes to benefit native workers. Bapco got a move on with overdue developments for rupee personnel, sometimes at the expense of social amenities demanded by dollar/sterling expatriates.

James Dunne, head of rupee personnel division, sent a note to the management: "Amer gave me the attached letter with a suggestion it might be found worthy of publication in the Islander. I believe it would be encouraging to him if something were done about its

publication. It is not entirely his own work. Knowing Amer's English, I suspect he has had some help. He has admitted to having 'a friend in Manama' help him. I fear it is mostly the friend's work." The censorship committee, Berdine, Smith and Brown, did not hesitate to find it worthy of publication.

The letter stated: "I hope a glimpse into the improvements effected to better the conditions of the Rupee Non-Contract Employees will be interesting to all Bapco people. Hence I propose to devote a little space of this paper to recapitulate the improvements effected.

"The year 1952 has been a remarkable one for the various and varied benefits that the Company awarded its employees. There is not one phase of life that has not been touched and improved. The first important change to note is the starting wages given to new employees. At present, a newly hired unskilled labourer gets Rs5 daily, which is 25 per cent higher than last year, and eight annas transportation allowance for each working day. The wage scales have been raised at the same rates, shift bonus has been doubled. Thus much has been done to take the sting out of the present high level of prices.

"More important are the facilities that the Company gives in the Education and Training of the employees. By means of the Company schools many a boy who did not even know his alphabet has been transformed into a budding clerk. Technical training also is given in the Company shops, thus training unskilled labourers into good welders, electricians, mechanics, drivers, etc. The Company has constructed three schools in the outlying villages so that the children there could have the benefit of education.

"The Company, aware of the old saying, 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' is equally interested in giving good recreational facilities for the employees. Sports requisites have been purchased at the Company's expense and well qualified supervision and instruction is also provided for. A cinema house and swimming pool are also under construction.

"The Company has constructed quarters to accommodate about 1,000 employees. The rooms are spacious and well ventilated. The doors and windows are provided with flyproof screens. Table fans are provided. Thus it has been made possible for the employee to

live in a healthy environment and at the same time save a lot of time by living near the job site.

"The higher aspects of life also are not forgotten. Along with the employees' quarters a Mosque is being built, so that no difficulty may be experienced by the employees in having their prayers conveniently. Thus, wherever we turn we find the paternal hand of the Company directing, assisting and building us to be better spiritually, economically and physically.

"I feel I would be failing in my duty if I did not thank the Management for the deep interest they take in us. I request them to extend the same sympathy and understanding that we have been receiving so far at their hands."

The letter was signed A M Amer, Administrative Assistant, Non-Contract Employees.

A public relations hack would have been proud to pen so fulsome an epistle. It was well, even cleverly, constructed, larded with facts and sustainable opinion. Whether it was heartfelt or tongue in cheek was something else. Assuming Amer inspired the letter, here looked like the hand of an Uncle Tom. He was not popular with the politicians in Manama who were always seeking ammunition to attack Bapco.

If someone was using Amer as a mouthpiece, it did him no harm. Soon after this, the company set up a non-European management-worker 'benefits committee' and appointed two men to represent Bahrainis and Indians. One was Amer. Later, Bapco provided six scholarships for university summer courses in Beirut. Amer was awarded one. He was a young man to watch, going places.

Amer's letter brought into the open matters which had earlier been rumours, including some discounted as too preposterous. The management divulged significant information sparingly. I found it galling. Supposedly keeper of the company's only organ of mass communication, I was among the more ignorant. The bazaar gossips in town knew more than I did about Bapco's business.

The unceasing stream of messages between Awali and New York, with copies on various files, simply asked for interception, and relevant information of a classified nature had to be passed on to departmental heads. So word got out and rumours were spread. Who

knew whether they had been inspired by a deliberate leak by management to test the water and await reaction?

Response to some proposed change, rumoured or real, might take the form of flyposted notices. Mutterings were broadcast. A rumour that the Awali club was to be opened to non-Europeans I dismissed as far fetched. But it provoked remarks such as "Over my dead body!" and threats of violence. To racists it was the thin edge of the wedge. But Bahrain's danger was being out of touch. Kuwait, latecomer to oil, had the benefit of hindsight and some measure of racial integration in the company.

In Saudi Arabia, where Ibn Saud had seen off rivals in bloody battles to assemble a far flung kingdom, there was no pussyfooting with American expatriates: no integration, no religion other than Islam, no liquor, no public cinemas or prostitution. A huge sports and leisure complex and air conditioned camps had to be rushed into existence by Aramco for Arab employees. The Saudi Government instructed the company to construct a railway line, which appeared to have little purpose beyond prestige, and pay for it out of future royalties. When Aramco said it needed time to discuss various matters between Arabia and the United States, Ibn Saud ordered Aramco to transfer head office from New York to the oil fields, and chairman Fred Davies, one time Bahrain general manager, found himself back in the Gulf.

Pressures in Bahrain were less rigorous and Bapco had to think of its European staff and their demands for adequate housing, ever growing demands. And there was the 600-seat cinema, promised after the original was burnt down on Christmas Eve 1943, which was a year or more behind schedule. The outdoor cinema was all right, given calm weather, but the boom of screen music and dialogue at 1am, when the two-hour performance for shift workers began, disturbed residents trying to sleep with windows open. Other amenities had been awaited since the development blueprint of 1949: a 200-seat assembly hall with workshops, a recreational building, a gym, a hall with four bowling alleys and games rooms and a spacious library. But these were trifling matters compared with the conditions of some hundreds of non-Europeans living in company property. The Persians and Indians living in Awali, mainly

houseboys and waiters, shared cramped quarters, some five to a room with sparse furniture, a wireless set and a few photographs. Passing on my way to the bunkhouse, I felt sorry for them. Some had been here for many years, working split shifts from early morning till late at night, yet never with the benefit of a club or a canteen. The best they could look forward to was a brief visit to Manama on their day off.

A dozen at a time ventured to the cinema area, standing on the fringes of the audience, never daring to bring a chair as the Europeans did. They sat at night in their dormitories or stretched outside on the bare earth, sleeping out of doors on mattresses, preferring the discomfort of humidity to the ineffectiveness of a single fan in a stifling bedroom.

It was at the end of 1951 that Bapco's construction boss, J P Purcell, wrote to head office on Fifth Avenue outlining plans for rupee personnel camp improvements and received permission to spend 700,000 US dollars on electric fans and a simple swimming pool. The accent was on second hand materials: the aging projection equipment at Awali cinema overhauled and moved to an Arab site, four old boilers reconditioned to provide domestic hot water. Developments included piped water for drinking and washing, a new well for irrigation and swimming pool purposes, glazing of windows, new mess buildings, games facilities and shelter for an outdoor coffee house and market stalls. Where I saw improvements, the best living space matched the Europeans' bunkhouses, though lacking air conditioning.

I wrote a page 1 story for the Islander, **WORK IN PROGRESS**, setting out the improvement plans for eastern workers and indicating that basic sanitary standards were the main aim. Promptly someone penned a parody, substituting bunkhouses for Arab quarters, which remained on the European dining hall notice board for an hour. A couple of days later, workmen were busily painting our bunkhouses and making good the Christmas storm damage; while steel fixers worked overtime erecting girders for our new cinema.

In the meantime, the European housing situation was deteriorating. Despite a steady turnover of labour - I estimated 350

recruits in 15 months - numbers overall continued to grow. Some 100 Australians were arriving for training for the new Australian refinery. Men were forced to double up in the bunkhouse, and the fact that it had happened before made it no less of a scandal. Many months passed before a body of men made a stand, 30 telling the management to leave them one to a room or send them home. A way was found to satisfy them.

After a year's service, I was told I had reached the head of the waiting list and transfer to the higher grade Coolie Camp was imminent. Then I was told all transfers were off.

Among the hundreds fretting in the bunkhouse were a number who had been led to believe their wives would be out after two years but now found a three-year wait for family homes. Imagine their anger when they read in the London Daily Express that Bapco's UK head, George Murray, was seeking three engineers. "The pay is £1,740 a year, rising, with free board and lodging. Any man taking a job should save the bulk of his salary for the company provides for everything. On the job, whisky sells at 12 shillings a bottle, gin 8s and cigarettes 7d and 8d for 20. But the jobs are a-begging.

"Snag is that these paradise jobs are in Bahrain. There the temperature soars to about 100 degrees in summer and never goes below 70 degrees. A spokesman for Mr Murray said, 'Trouble is, Bahrain has no glamour. If it were Malaya or Borneo we would get the men easily. But Bahrain is a swell place compared with some countries. Each man has an air conditioned flat or bungalow and can take his wife and family with him."

Rumours were circulating that the company was unable to find qualified engineers prepared to take the responsibility of running refinery and powerhouse installations where pressure to meet growing demand for petroleum products dangerously overloaded plant, which was in any case aging. Each new output record further exceeded manufacturers' ratings, ran the whispers. Fatalities in an explosion in the Saudi refinery increased fears. The rumours, however, were not confirmed. More was demanded of plant.

I felt sorry for Bill Steele, a quiet, unassuming young chap who looked on Bahrain as home. His late father had been State Engineer, responsible for setting up public utilities, notably the Manama

power station in 1930. Oil officials who had fawned over the father bore no sentimental attachment to the son. He had a lowly desk job in Awali and a cell in the bunkhouse.

He loved Bahrain and among his friends in Manama were a couple who treated him like a son. It was painful, his having no decent place in which to return hospitality. One evening I joined Bill and four of his Manama friends, the current state engineer Brammer and his wife and British officials from Eastern Bank and Norwich Union. We had dinner in the dining hall, saw a film and then went back to Bill's room for a nightcap and gossip, six of us sitting on his single bed, a trunk and two canvas chairs. It didn't seem right.

The sizzling, searing summer, my second, seemed endless, but life had to go on. The sun was probably less dangerous than the booze. Some men couldn't leave it alone. There was a bloated clerk who always took a vacuum flask into his office (the Yanks thought the Brits odd, taking tea and coffee into work), but this man's flask was filled with whisky. He did not last long.

I was set on seeing a contract out, two years, not a day more nor less. As a once in a lifetime experience, it meant that anything missed could not be picked up later. Time was not to be wasted unduly, so I had to devise a routine. If I was frustrated or bored at work, I approached leisure with some zest. Between knocking off shift and dinner, I regularly tuned in to the crackling BBC. I went to the pictures once a week, twice for an exceptional programme. When it got cooler, I played an hour's football or cricket before nightfall.

Every Tuesday night was floodlit tennis. My regular partner was the rum Pinhey, a mildly distinguished figure who was past his prime. He came from the Residency and had also held the rank of Lieut Colonel. Bapco gave him some meaningless title like Special Assistant to the General Manager. I suspected his was a sinecure, or maybe he was still on the British Government's payroll. Try as I might, I could not wrinkle out of Pinhey what he was up to, he refused to stray beyond small talk. Every Thursday night there was music and dancing at the club and a couple of times I played the drums. There were parties to attend and I was invited to some splendid dinners. It was this opportunity to put on the style once in a

while that kept solid working class folk in Awali. They could hardly have done it in England, certainly not kept a servant or two. During my last six months I lost a lot of sleep by spending a lot of time playing at late night dances. As a drummer I knew my limitations, but nobody else wanted the job. Two years after I first started work, I had saved up the princely sum of £10, more than enough to buy a secondhand drum kit and, unsupervised, set about learning to play. I was all right performing in pubs and at house parties, displaying panache aplenty with drum rolls, rim shots and cymbal crashes. But dance halls were another matter.

My trouble was timing. A percussionist might get away with rubato in music hall but it's not a recognised ballroom tempo. A drummer needs to be as constant and meticulous as a metronome, while I - I was more a wandering minstrel, accelerating a sedate waltz to a Viennese whirl, diminishing a quickstep to a slow foxtrot. A famous occasion in Pompey Barracks during my early Naval service I can never recall without blushing.

I was lying in bed in the sick bay with a chest infection when a message came over the Tannoy: "Drummer required for officers' dance tonight." An hour later it was repeated, with urgency. Forgetting the golden rule - "Never volunteer for anything" - I asked a nurse if I could be discharged to answer the call to drum duty. She called the MO who said I was under observation, my request was highly irregular, be it on my own head, and then he released me.

I met the pianist leader of the band at his minor berth in the pay office and explained that I was a drummer fresh from hospital. He gave me a suspicious look. "Are you all right?"

"Sure," I replied.

"I'll see you at 7.15 sharp. The dance starts at 7.30," he said.

In a spruced up mess hall, I set up the drums. Officers of various ranks and chief petty officers arrived, escorting local floosies and service girls. An expectant hum filled the air.

We were a four-piece and the other musicians clearly knew their stuff. We stayed together for the opening waltz, but then, unfortunately, my timing in the quickstep went all to pieces and the pianist's hissed instructions, "Quicker...Slower!" and pounding the beat with his heel only aggravated my erratic course.

The dancers, officers and ladies, were confused. They tried to adjust to my bass drum beat, stopped, fastened irate glances on the quartet and drifted off the floor. It was terribly embarrassing for everyone. I think I could justly say I ruined the dance all on my own, though without malice aforethought. I took the ten-shilling fee at the end, but very reluctantly.

During the hotter months of 1952, the Awali club had difficulty recruiting a band for Thursday night dances. It was pointless booking a trio if two players had to leave halfway through to go on shift. I had from time to time attended band rehearsals and in October appeared at the club with a new group. We were only four-piece and pretty corny, and I had a feeling our efforts were not well appreciated by the dancers; but it was a change from gramophone records. The night was very humid and the drumskins stayed flabby in spite of repeated tightening, making the tone of tom-toms.

Our next practice saw changes made. A trumpeter who had left after a disagreement with the sax player returned to the fold, and the pianist-leader, a not very popular cove, stepped down for a new pianist. We had a spirited two-hour session and anticipated success at the traditional Poppy Day dance.

This year the Americans decided to making a big thing of the Poppy Day collection, the British invention in aid of British ex-servicemen. Nearly every married woman in Awali was roped in to make up snack boxes and bake cakes or take a collecting tin round the houses, while single women were given raffle tickets to sell. General manager Brown started a crazy scheme by inviting six people to cocktails on payment of one rupee each. The six in turn invited five each, the five four and so on until every man was host to one other, paying a rupee. The process boosted liquor sales.

The dance went off well. Lots of bigwigs turned up with their wives and respectable sums were made by the cake stall and from a casino which went on well into the small hours. A newly arrived wife won a handsome Persian carpet in the raffle. We played at another big dance on American Thanksgiving Day. We all dined well on turkey and trimmings that night. The Caledonian Society had their annual dinner with the usual VIPs and after the speeches they took to the crowded dance floor.

The band, grown to a sextet, was beginning to encroach on my precious leisure, though I enjoyed our sessions and *once my* colleagues had sorted out their personality differences *we were a* reasonable combination. Most of the time they had to busk, *for we* had practically no music until one of the lads had a batch of *new* sheet music sent out from home. Our repertoire was *restricted and* there was a limit to the number of times in one night that *we could* repeat Honeysuckle Rose, White Cliffs of Dover, Stardust, *What's* Taking You Home Tonight? and Glenn Miller classics. *Fleeting* fame landed us with invitations from the Raj and places *beyond* Awali's gates. While we packed 'em in at outside gigs, visiting *Royal* Marine pro musicians won greater acclaim on our home patch.

Bapco club funds modestly rewarded us with rupees for a four-hour session. Outside we played for our supper. Capt Ray C Needham, of the US flagship in the Gulf, the Duxbury Bay, looked after us when we played at a dance for his ship's company at the Jufair naval base, supplying victuals - a bottle of rye whisky, beer unlimited and lashings of turkey salad - and souvenir cigarette lighters. The ship's ten-piece orchestra gave us a break, then two ratings and an officer sat in with us and we really went to town.

Next it was the turn of the Air Force at Muharraq, when everybody who could claim to be somebody in the country turned up to a dance in aid of the RAF Benevolent Fund and St Christopher's Church building fund. Fortunately not all who bought tickets in excess of 200 came, for the intimate atmosphere of the officers' mess was more akin to a nightclub than a dance hall. The bar did a roaring trade. We were in our fifth hour of playing when, at 2.30, I was so tired that I just downed drumsticks. It was nearly four o'clock when we got back to our own billets.

Naval reinforcements, HMS Wren and HMS Dalrymple, anchored off the islands in preparation for the great annual state occasion, New Year's Day at the Residency. Nearly 300 men got shore leave for a Christmas party at Jufair and we were summoned to provide music. At times like this, in foreign lands far from home, Our Ladies are always there ready and willing to do their bit for Our Boys from the Mother Country. This was a typical example of unselfish gallantry, some 40 or 50 women, Manama wives, Awali

wives led by Mrs Brown, unattached nurses and air hostesses, fighting their way through the massed ranks of sailors and airmen in a far from adequate hall to serve free beer nonstop, as well as soup and cold meats, fruit and Christmas cake. And they were dancing partners too. For the musicians, our quintet, it was a merry night, but I feared the women would be nursing more than a few bruises next day.

But Lady Hay thought it was super. She sent me a note: "I don't think there is any need to tell you how much the men appreciated having what they called a 'live' band. It made a tremendous difference to the dance. I wish you could have heard their comments. From the partners' point of view, it saved the situation!"

Christmas in Awali was short and more or less quiet. High spirits were saved for New Year's Eve. Many houses bulged with parties of revellers in fancy dress, while a grander scale version assembled on the club terraces after a sumptuous turkey dinner. At the last moment, I decided to enter the costume competition as a Fugitive from St Trinian's, borrowing a gym slip and a schoolgirl hat from the drama group.

Suitably clad in summerwear, I took my place at the drums. When the MC announced the fancy dress contest I removed my slacks, shook out the concealed gym slip and joined the parade. Awarded second prize, a bottle of champagne and a tankard, I went back to the drums. It was a boisterous night of song and dance, tangled webs of coloured streamers and popping balloons, novelty hats and prize spot waltzes. The band was in good form, the throng great as any I could recall, over 500 controlled by Percy Hall, Master of Ceremonies.

It was 1.30 when we packed up our instruments and I was ready for bed, remembering I had an important engagement in the morning. But the sax player said, "Let's go visiting, eh?" A shade worse for drink, we meandered down the slope from the club to the family estates and dropped in where lights were showing and drink flowing. It was about 4.30 when someone put me in a car and I was dumped outside my bunkhouse. I felt for my key to undo the padlock on my door. But no key, because no trousers!

Where, oh where, had I left my trousers after the fancy dress business? I must have them for the key to my room. I was in no fit state to be out of doors. But where...? Befuddled, I guessed I must have left them at the clubhouse. Staggering, half running, I panted up the incline to the club some hundreds of yards off. The native watchman gave me an odd look - this lanky man in a gym slip! - then helped me search the darkened premises for the missing trousers. No luck! I tried to remember the houses we called at. Only one came to mind: the nurses' home, where we sang a carol, knocked and got short shrift.

Was it possible? I looked up the nurses' phone number in the club's directory and rang. A woman's sleepy voice said, "Hello, what do you want?" I mumbled, "Sorry to bother you, but I've lost my trousers. I didn't leave 'em at your place, did I?"

I didn't catch the imprecation as the phone went dead.

I returned to the dark, silent bunkhouse and from the outside tore off the wire screen over my window and managed to open it and climb in. The mess hall would shortly be serving early breakfast and I had an appointment...it hardly seemed worthwhile going to bed. I stretched out and slumbered instantly.

The houseboy did not wake me with morning tea, surmising that as my door was padlocked I was out. But a conversation outside the door disturbed me and it dawned on me that the company driver had called to take me to Jufair and the houseboy had told him I was not in. I leapt from my bed to the door, banging it with my fist. "Yusuf, Yusuf, open the door!"

He did so with his duplicate key, then puzzled by my Houdini act asked, "How...?"

"Never mind," I said. "See if you can get the driver back."

Minutes ticked by waiting for the driver and I feared I would miss the state occasion. But these young Arab drivers were no slouches at the wheel and we reached Jufair just in time to see the cavalcade arrive. His Highness, splendidly attired, was borne by a roomy Rolls Royce through an avenue of RAF men with fixed bayonets. His escort of mounted state police numbered 17, with scarlet turbans and a lance apiece. The shaikh alighted, inspected a Royal Navy guard

of honour, then entered the hall where a waiting assembly of some 450 people rose as one.

Her Britannic Majesty's Political Resident in the Gulf, Sir Rupert Hay, whose show this was, offered humble greetings. Coffee was served to the multitude, then the host made his important New Year's statement, saying that once more it was his great honour... good wishes from HM Government... peace, goodwill and understanding... respect for HH, wise and beneficent, etc. A translator repeated it in Arabic.

Hay followed with the part everyone was anxious to know: the names of civil servants, commercial agents and other Brits who had been awarded CBEs, MBEs, and ex-Indian Empire medals in the Queen's New Year's Honours.

Rose water finger bowls were passed round. We all took a sniff from the incense burner carried down the aisles, and then all processed from the hall to Sir Rupert's official residence. Each of the guests shook hands with the ruler and with each other and lemon drinks were served.

Deferential bowing helped His Highness on his way as he rejoined his Rolls and vanished in a cloud of dust. This was the signal for the urgent unlocking of cabinets in the Residency. Out came numerous bottles of duty free whisky and gin and sherry. And Sir Rupert, decked in his statutory finery, addressed those assembled, the ladies in long frocks and large hats, the more senior men in morning coats with top hats and the lesser in lounge suits. With a patrician gesture, he declared, "Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all a Happy New Year. Now help yourselves."

I had a couple of beers and returned to Awali for lunch. Dropping in at the club, I was approached by the manager. "I've got a pair of trousers in my office with your laundry tag."

The new year brought eminent personages to Bahrain, not least the chairman of the board, Pinckard, in whose honour all was made ship shape and Bristol fashion. In his entourage was the public relations chief who had just inspected the publicity machine in Saudi Arabia. He was surprised to find the conditions I worked in and said I deserved a department of my own. I didn't want a department, just freedom to report. Even now I was kept out of

things. Too late, I discovered that Pinckard had addressed some 250 men and women, employees and wives, to outline plans and deal with questions. I was not invited. Presumably the chairman learned something of the effects of the policy of rapid expansion. At the end of 1952, employees totalled 8,716, an increase of 1,000 in a year. The sterling-dollar payroll of 1,157 was higher by 152; Indian sub-continent workers 788, an increase of 90; and local workers 6,771, an increase of 758. More expatriate wives and families, from east and west, joined Bapco husbands.

The housing crisis thereby caused in Awali was echoed in the Arab towns, particularly Manama. Building land was hard to come by and expensive. Some fine houses and flats were going up in Manama, in ever widening circles, but the rents at £50 a month or so were fine for landlords. Developers worked on the premise that investment was about to sweep into tax-free Bahrain and new foreign firms would pay any price for housing their staff.

An anomaly over pay was making itself felt: new recruits from east and west were commanding higher rates than employees with long service. In a meeting with the chairman and the general manager, the Arab and Indian spokesmen on the new welfare committee were able to make their petitions but secured only sympathy, not commitments. Jack Robinson, there to take official photographs, gave me a report. The Indians complained about bad and expensive private housing and asked for company accommodation. The Bahrainis appealed for more money, comparing Bapco's heavy goods drivers on eight rupees a day with contractors' men getting 11 rupees for lighter duties.

"We are constantly watching and reviewing wages and the cost of living," the bosses told the workers. Robinson thought it odd that the chairman had not played the company's trump cards: benefit schemes, free hospital treatment and permanent jobs, such as contractors could not provide. The Bahrainis also asked for free medical services for families, stopped two years before.

Life in Bahrain for employees from the Indian sub-continent was not ideal, but many stuck it out. Ramchandra, a clerk-typist in accounts, a cultured, soft-spoken man, had completed 15 years. Compared to rates in India, pay was good. An office wage could

amount to 265-700 rupees a month, an average of around 450 rupees, plus 20 per cent cost of living and 75 rupees for housing.

The Indian Government had for four years pressed Bapco to pay for children's passages as it paid air fares for British and American children. All the management would say was that the matter was being considered, without indicating - if that was its fear - that Indian wives would bring a dozen children with them. The 1952 muster showed Indian wives numbering 129 and children 200, against western wives 387 and children 374.

Apparently more children were left in India. Of those in Bahrain, about 80 attended a primary school established by the Indian community in 1951. A tiny contingent of Goanese children went to a Catholic school. A problem was teaching children from widely separated parts of India with different dialects. "The school's main function is to make children school-conscious," said Ramchandra.

A large reservoir of English speaking educated young men in India seeking to improve their lot was a boon to the oil companies in the Gulf. They could attract the best, including the applicant for a clerk's job advertised by Bapco. He wrote: "I am a young man of 23 years of age with active habits and strong physique coming from a respectable family in Bombay. However, I am prepared to abide by the rules and regulations of your esteemed firm."

With no sign of an end to the Persian oil crisis, the other firms were ceaselessly expanding operations. Bapco needed more men to cover local growth and to replace senior managers assigned to other parts of the Caltex empire. It was also facing a growing clamour for promotion of local employees. General manager Brown told supervisors, "Faced with the current and anticipated need for management talent, the Company feels it cannot be left to chance. For this reason, it is embarking on a long range plan to accelerate the growth of its junior and potential supervisors and to increase the effectiveness of employees filling management positions at all levels and on all payrolls."

Berdine and two other senior officials were sent to Pittsburgh University for a course on "Management problems for executives." American consultants were brought to Bahrain to pass on their experiences of sound management practices and 125 supervisors

took part in a series of conferences. One outcome of these deliberations was the introduction of the employee profile scheme, Appraisal and Development.

Another was contained in a message from Brown to All Supervisors: "Here is the first number of our New Management Bulletin. It represents another step forward in our efforts to improve our system of communications and it will be issued from time to time as required. The purpose of the Bulletin is to keep everyone informed about current company development and, through improved communications, to strengthen the entire Bapco team."

A laudable initiative if it meant scotching rumours or putting flesh on them. Yet, if the bulletin was to keep everyone informed, why was it addressed only to supervisors; and if it was to improve communications, why keep the editor of the Islander in the dark? I was not on the mailing list and my copies were smuggled in. Two senior Americans, Oswald the good churchman and Squires of personnel relations, confessed that supervisors were being given advance information of events to make them feel important. Squires even confided that the bulletin was "the official party line. It may not be the truth but what the company wants people to know."

Certainly, with these welcome changes the management was making a virtue out of necessity. The Bulletin declared, "It has always been the intent of the company that Awali be regarded as a part of the social and economic community of Bahrain and not an isolated, self-sufficient compound."

It was a hollow denial. Awali was an isolated, self-sufficient compound. More ghetto than gulag, it deserved the designation 'camp' for its ring fence topped by barbed wire. Road barriers pierced the fence in three places where uniformed guards kept vigil. The ruler, it was believed, had dropped a hint about raising the barriers. According to Bulletin number 2 of February 1953, "The amount of activity between the company and other business enterprises has reached a point where the barriers at the entrances to Awali are an incongruity. In the past few days they have been fixed in a raised position. Does that mean that Awali is now open? Awali has never, in fact, been a closed community of European and other expatriate employees. It has always been open, but barriers, for

whatever purpose, have a forbidding aspect and it has been felt for some time that they do not truly represent the company's policy in relation to other Bahrain communities.

"Aside from securing the barriers in a raised position, no other changes are involved. The fence is primarily to keep out wild dogs and donkeys, and prevent Awali children from straying into the desert." Guards would still exercise vigilance at the gates and motoring residents would be expected to slow down to be recognised.

Curiously, no other town or settlement in Bahrain required a fence to keep dogs or donkeys out and children in. Had I known Awali was free and open I would not have instructed my friend Abdul Rahman Al Bakr to keep his head down in the taxi when I brought him to the bunkhouse to see how the poor lived and to drink my whisky. There was something disingenuous about the company's statement. Donkeys and wild dogs were an afterthought; if anything was to be kept out it was thieves and spectres.

Until now, I suspected, the psychology of the barbed wire had never been thought through. We were like a beleaguered camp; in keeping others out, we kept ourselves in. The insularity thus bred, manifested in the indifference to native life, was likely to remain with Awali's hardened old timers, never mind the barriers.

The Management Bulletin - three issues rushed out in three weeks - was full of exciting tidbits which would have interested the Islander's rather wider readership. It mentioned that the suggestion box scheme had been aired first in the Islander. "Suggestions rolled in from all quarters, from employees on several payrolls and residents. One employee contributed 33 ideas. During the first three months, about half of the suggestions submitted were adopted in whole or in part. Among these were the provision of car parks at the club and bus shelters on the main roads."

It was felt, however, that some employees were reluctant to make suggestions "due to a fear that it will be regarded as a complaint or criticism. Such fears are without foundation, and supervisors should reassure all employees that suggestions are sincerely welcomed as an indication of interest in improvement. After all, it's your Company and your community too."

The Bulletin brought to light the existence of the committee on which Bahraini and Indian spokesmen could make representations to the management. This Benefits Committee for rupee payroll personnel was chaired by Pinhey with Dr W J Moody in attendance. One of its tasks was to advise Bahrainis whether it was in their interests to retire at 55 or to carry on working, subject to the doctor's and the general manager's approval. Sometimes it was in the company's interests to retain experienced workers, who in any case might not be 55. In the absence of birth registration and certificates, many an Arab took a wild guess at his age. Youngsters inflated their ages to get a job, men who looked 40 swore they were not above 30 to allow them to apply for a night school place with an age limit of 30.

The Bulletin hinted that European bachelors might be given a food allowance instead of free meals in the dining hall. The company would help Awali residents solve their cook-houseboy shortage by recruiting for them in India.

More significantly, it announced that a group of most senior eastern employees had been invited to use the Bapco Club facilities along with a small number of prominent merchants and state officials. This put to rest the old speculation that I had dismissed as absurd gossip. The threats made at that time, the murmuring of white supremacist employees of violence if any Arab or Indian dare step over the club's threshold came to nothing. Four or five Bahrainis, including Amer, visited the club regularly on a Thursday, remaining until midnight to establish a principle. Any pleasure was minimal as they sat sipping lemonade or coffee, observing their western peers getting tipsy and sometimes behaving boorishly.

Thus far, the Bulletin's messages had an Arab content, promising promotion, pensions and a slackening of discrimination. The one of exclusive concern to Europeans related to housing, the management admitting that its building programme was lagging. But in addressing its comments to supervisors, it was picking on the wrong audience, for supervisors were by their very nature already comfortably housed. It was the other ranks whose need was desperate. At best, 76 new family units would be erected in 1953 and hundreds were on the waiting list. The management was aware

of "the present acute situation" but expressed no sorrow or regret. "Housing assignments are based on a number of factors such as position, importance to the company, irreplaceability, likelihood of long continued service and other factors in addition to length of service," said the Bulletin.

It continued, "It may be small comfort to an employee separated from his family but it may serve to give an indication of what other companies as well as Bapco are up against. A recent survey shows that at Kuwait and Qatar, senior staff employees normally do not receive consideration for married housing until after three years service in the field. At Aramco the picture is slightly better: an employee may receive married housing after approximately 2½ years of service, a situation roughly comparable to the picture at Bapco."

I thought it was scandalous. The idea that oil companies were "up against" something was ludicrous. They were cashing in on the Persian shutdown, making pots of money and taking it out on lower grade employees. Here was the free market, so beloved of oil barons, supply and demand at its best. A man might enjoy family life shared with his wife and kids (or be denied it) not on any grounds of right or humanity, but by one simple test...were his services dispensable? Length of service, with and for the company, was meaningless.

There was another way of acquiring a spacious life style. The sword. That route enabled generations of Khalifas to dwell in palaces. To the ruler's palace at Rafaa I was directed on Friday the 13th of February 1953, through its ornamented portals and solid lime washed walls. By the entrance stood grand motor cars, all new and roomy and shiny. They must have cost a pretty penny or dollar or rupee, forty vehicles, maybe more.

Jack Robinson left his humble auto at a discreet distance and we walked to the palace for our 10 o'clock appointment with His Highness to engage in his favourite sport: posing for the camera. We were soon engulfed by a horde coming out, all shaikhs wearing identical garb and the satisfied looks of footballs fans leaving the stadium after seeing their team win. The ascetic figure of elder statesman Abdulla brushed past us, followed by the rest of the mature Khalifas - all male, of course - making for their cars.

The ruling family had just finished their usual Friday morning pow-wow, which gave opportunity for matters of state and domestic affairs to be raised and for relations to press the ruler for money. I could not imagine it was anything like the previous Friday when, seated in Wazzan's shop in the bazaar, I counted eight old ragged beggars in ten minutes, each awarded a coin worth a farthing by the shopkeeper.

For the Khalifas, the good times were beginning to roll after two decades of oil production, during which time it seemed to many that Bapco had exploited the Bahrain Government's innocence and the British Government's dubious role as state protector.

Now the ruler's decision to levy a 50 per cent tax on Bapco's notional profits and to keep one-third of that income for his family's privy purse meant hundreds of thousands of pounds or dollars pouring in, and millions in prospect. And the ruler's kin, 500 men, women and children, would all claim a place on the palace payroll. No wonder they looked happy.

The majles just vacated by the family had the dimensions of a school gym and was a modern extension to the fortlike palace. Pale pink patterned carpeting ran from the entrance doors at one end to a small desk at the other, a desk simply furnished with cigars, cigarettes, a lighter and pen and ink.

Overhead, gaudy carpets adhered to the lofty ceilings, above rows of fans and chandeliers and tinted skylights. A solid rank of divans and easy chairs clung to the long walls, all blue upholstered with an ashtray fixed to every arm. The ruler's three sons squeezed together on one sofa, overdressed in the manner of their father in multicoloured raiment and encumbered by gold daggers tucked in waistbands and curved swords.

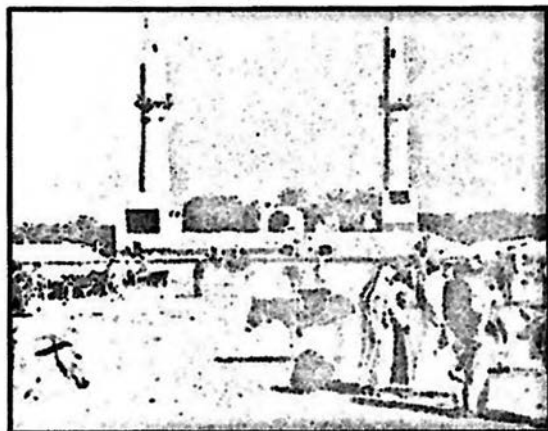
Isa, aged 19, and Khalifa, 17, both lean and exquisitely groomed looked but distantly related to Mohammed, 13, chubby and careless of his appearance. Their smattering of English came from thrice-weekly instruction from an Egyptian. They were quite keen to be photographed and thought it all a great joke. When Robinson invited the ruler to pose with his sons, the old man observed that he was not wearing his sword so he made the boys remove theirs.

As His Highness came out to show us off his premises, a tall, elderly hook-nosed Persian came out of the shadows, a spare figure in tight trousers, a long coat and skull cap. He dwarfed Shaikh Sulman, whose hand he kissed before making a plea of some kind in a confidential tone. It was the final act of a conventional Sabbath morning at the palace.

Parting from Robinson, who was motoring, I marched across the desert towards Awali. Near enough to the palace to be called neighbours, I came across two crude stone and coral constructions stuck in a no man's land like tents pitched in a vast field. They were houses belonging, I was surprised to discover, to two young Arab clerks I knew in Awali. I was prevailed upon to enter by them, but first I had to wait while the host shooed the women out of sight.

The first dwelling was pathetic: dry stone walls enclosing a small yard and a single room set in each of two corners. A tiny door led into the smaller room, a coarse-walled cell without windows, which was clean if not very tidy or wholesome smelling and, of course, lacking power and plumbing. The owner, aged about 16, said he lived alone with his mother and had paid £65 for this hovel. The guest room of the other house was bigger, with plastered white walls inset with three doors and a window, a spotless room furnished with cheap matting and two cushions. I declined the kind offer of a meal but accepted a dozen small cups of black coffee and tea, with sweet biscuits, which took the edge off my appetite when I got back to Awali for lunch.

Thursday Market and the Thursday Mosque



Buyers and
sellers, the
travelling barber
(left) on his
bicycle and
donkeys and
livestock
assembled every

Thursday in the shadow of the ancient mosque, the
ruined Masjid al Khamis.





Princess Marina,
Duchess of Kent, on
a flying visit, met
Rupert Hay and
British expatriates.
BELOW: The
Police Band.



A Khalifa shaikh and Ahmed Kanoo outside Kanoo offices.

Falconers at Rafaa Palace.





Opening of village schools

LEFT: Russ Brown, Edward Skinner
and Shaikh Abdulla.



ABOVE: The ruler's
orator, Hussain Yateem,
delivering an address.

RIGHT: Sir Charles
Belgrave, adviser to the
ruler.



LEFT: Denny Berdine,
Bapco personnel chief.



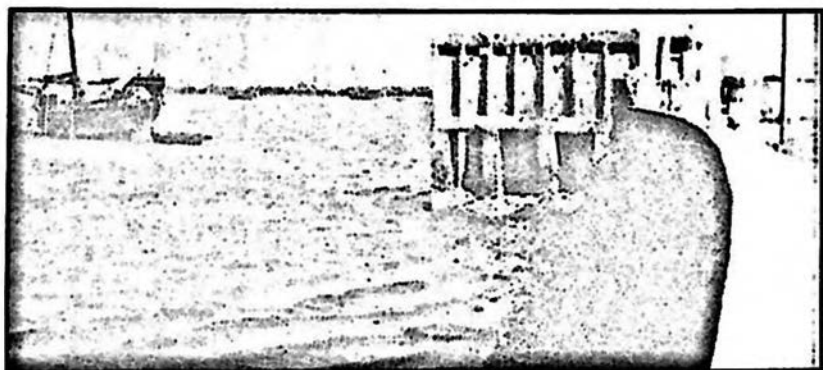
BELOW: From left, Ahmed Umran, Director of education;
R.M. Brown, Bapco general manager; E. Skinner, Bapco
vice-president; and Shaikh Sulman, Bahrain's ruler.





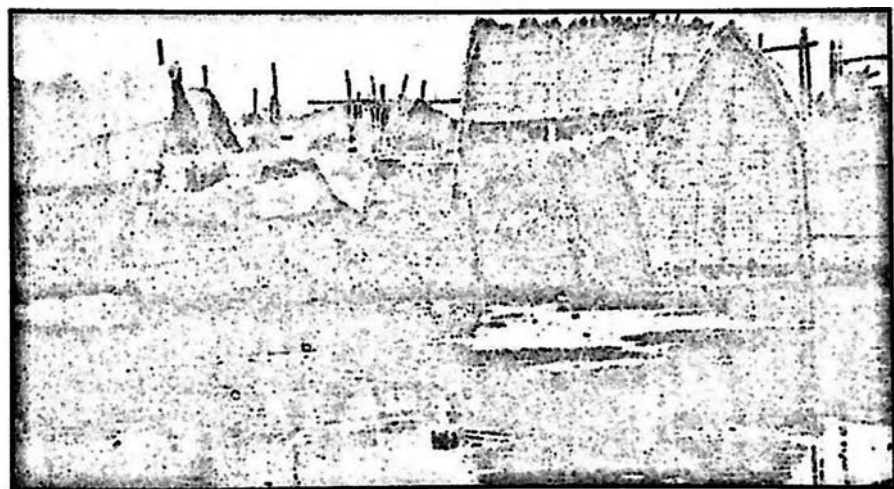
**MANAMA
LIFE
IN 1953**

**Top: The luxury of tap water.
Centre: The first council houses.
Bottom: Seafront public lavatory.**





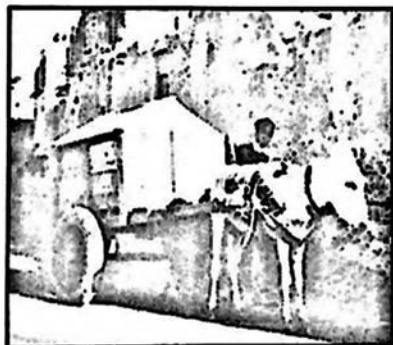
Manama: After fire (above) and torrential rain.



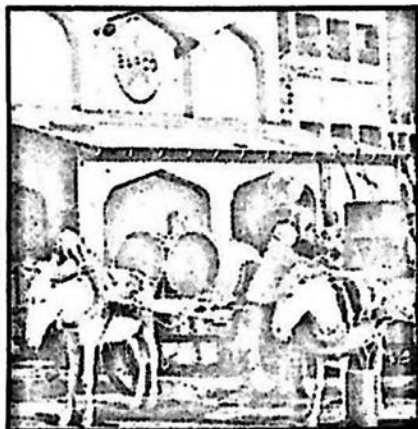
Doing the donkey work



Above: Fetching water skins from the well. Below: Pulling a municipal dustcart.



Above: Humping limestone from the desert. Below: Hauling Bapco oil drums.



...While the lofty camel looks on disdainfully!



Ashoora

Manama, 1952



Women wait and wail.
Swordsmen draw own blood.



Left and below:
Shias scourging the
back with chains to
mark the martyrdom
of Hussain.





TOMBS AT AALI, INSIDE AND OUTSIDE



12 Fire disaster

THE HOMELY character of the Bahrain Islander precluded mention of matters of a sensational or riotous kind. Happenings, real or imagined, that occurred in Bahrain or neighbouring states and went unreported included the refinery explosion in Arabia, the alleged sabotage of two Bapco oil wells, a strike threat by kitchen and dining hall staff in Awali over revised split-shift hours, and the accidental killing of an Arab worker by a British driver on the Sitra causeway.

In the Qatar oilfields, across the water, workers faced harsh conditions in camps far from town. The Arabs went on strike for better pay and accommodation and threatened to kill Indian employees and burn down their quarters if they continued to work. The stoppage became total. Arabs struck in Saudi Arabia and an attempt to organise a trade union was put down.

Some 120 Arabs came to Awali headquarters to demand a bus between their homes in Sitra and the refinery. They had to walk to and from work after the private bus operator withdrew his service. They were some of the firm's best men, including Ibrahim, the typing teacher, and they supposedly told Jimmy Dunne in Personnel that he had the choice of providing a company bus or sacking them. They were not going to walk. Dunne said he could do neither, so the leaders went to Rafaa Palace to complain to the ruler. But he was away hunting. The leaders then went to Muharraq to see old Shaikh Abdulla and he told them to come back in three days, presumably after he had contacted Bapco. It was not the first incident of its kind. Trouble was, the ruler told Bapco to let local operators run buses and then they fell down on the job.

A dispute of another order had been festering for a long time over the Buraimi oasis on the Trucial Coast, in an area of ill defined borders. The Sultan of Muscat claimed it. But the resident tribe, whose income derived from gifts from shaikhs in neighbouring

territories and from robbing Bedu, argued that Muscat gave them nothing and they wanted protection and beneficence from Ibn Saud. The king sent in an occupying force of 40 and the sultan wanted to despatch troops to expel them, but the British told him not to and flew some RAF Meteors over the oasis to show the flag.

We were sitting in Al Bakr's office one morning. Present were Al Bakr and three of his political intimates and next to me an old man I had not seen before, a tall, lean figure in a cheap white gown, probably a villager, I thought. They were in earnest discussion in Arabic. Innocently, I lit a cigarette and puffed away contentedly. The stranger carried a walking stick, a cane, and without warning he raised it and struck me on the arm; not a painful blow, yet obviously admonitory. At the same time he poured a torrent of words on me. I protested that I did not understand and carried on smoking. After the old man left, Al Bakr explained that he was the Imam of Oman's prime minister and had just been to see Ibn Saud to ask him to protect Buraimi. He was a Wahabi, from the puritanical tradition violently opposed to tobacco. I was lucky to escape with a caning, Al Bakr said with a grin. "They usually chop a hand off!"

In pacifying the Gulf, deterring invasions of Bahrain, halting Bahraini incursions into Qatar and stifling insurrections in Bahrain, Britain naturally made enemies. Getting rid of feuding Khalifas, recalcitrant merchants and agitators followed a standard practice of exile. One troublemaker after another was banished to Bombay. But British intervention in domestic affairs in spite of the assertion that Bahrain was an independent state was not always welcomed.

A passport department was set up in 1928 in a bid to control illegal immigration, but in the 1930s large numbers of Persians slipped ashore on lonely coastline and secured oil company jobs. Growing prosperity enticed an influx of Indians who claimed to be relatives of people living in Bahrain and set up as tailors, barbers, jewellers and shopkeepers. Belgrave bemoaned: "Once highly undesirable aliens have entered it is almost impossible to repatriate them. Being foreigners, they are not under Bahrain Government control."

The new industrial climate brought demands for reforming the feudal system of government. The British made plans for changing the judicial system and extending the powers of the political agent

and provoked local opposition. In 1938, the British declared martial law over a clamour for native courts, trade unions and a legislative council. The leaders, exiled, set up an organisation in Iraq to fight 'British oppression' in the Gulf.

In 1943, a number of Bapco labourers went on strike for some days and won a pay increase, leading Belgrave to speculate that the ringleaders must have picked up the idea from listening to radio reports of industrial unrest around the world.

A decade later, the mantle of dissent fell upon the Social Services Society, which sounded like a tautology but was the Anglicised title the local politicians adopted and shortened to SSS. They appeared to be less than a cohesive unit, though any petty jealousies or rivalries among them might have been the mark of political sophistication. In their favour, being both sunni and shia, they spanned the disruptive religious divide. They numbered 45 men, between the ages of mid-20s and 40.

The idea put about that they were illiterate hotheads was wide of the mark. They dressed wholly or partly in European fashion, spoke English fluently in many cases and had been taught by a man they revered and called The Professor, Ibrahim al Arrayed. One said, "We worship him."

The Professor, a distinguished figure, brother of the law courts superintendent, was tutor to many important merchants. He had a motto: "I teach my boys to fly; which direction they take is up to them." It was said he was too radical for the Government or he would have been director of education. He had the finest library in Bahrain and gave 20,000 volumes to the Arubah Club in Manama. The society was a progressive movement whose members were not necessarily all pointed in the same direction, especially where self-interest had a hand. What, I wondered, had headmaster Jishy in common with wealthy merchant Ahmed Kanoo. But all, Jishy, Ali Tajer, Al Hassan, Al Bakr, shopkeeper Ali Wazzan and others, were united in anti-Jewish sentiments. Mohammed Kanoo applauded a Voice of Bahrain campaign to replace a Jewish shop at Muharraq airport by an Arab store. "It looks bad," he said, "when people land in an Arab country and the first person they see is a Jew."

The core of the organisation was the editorial committee of Voice of Bahrain. Editor Abdul Rahman Al Bakr was secretary and leader, aged about 40 I guessed, a squat figure in a small way of business in an untidy little office in the bazaar. He appeared more worldly than his colleagues, and leaned towards the hedonistic on his frequent travels through the Arab world. He was as earnest as any, but less grim. When Wazzan half seriously said to me, "Take care, Abdul Rahman is dangerous, he will get you into trouble," the dangerous man chuckled.

When I told Ali Tajer and Jishy that they had been described by another man as extremists, they did not laugh but vehemently denied the accusation.

To my regret, I had no role to play in the society's affairs. I felt an affinity with their aspirations, but amiable relations with the leaders over several months were no substitute for total trust. So far as I knew, they had no European links, on or off the island. There was practically nothing I could tell them; they knew more about developments in the oil company than I did.

When I asked Abdul Rahman what plans the society was making, he shook his head. Not now, he said. When I was due to leave Bahrain, he would unburden himself. We had a good rapport. He kept me abreast of troubles in neighbouring states, especially strikes in the oilfields. A serious strike in Bahrain was his ambition and he was trying to find a way to raise substantial funds to finance a two-week strike. Partial stoppages within Bapco had occurred in the past, but he wanted a real strike leading to the setting up of a trade union for Arab employees. Industrial action, properly organised, appeared to be the only way forward in developing countries weighed down by foreign domination and domestic feudalism. In the absence of the ballot box and reliable channels of communication, scope for political parties was limited.

Bahrain's dissidents were well aware of the achievements of the Labour Government in Britain in five years after the war, such as establishing the Welfare State and nationalising basic industries, including coal which corresponded to oil in Bahrain. And that government had strong trade union roots, a point not lost on Al Bakr. He invited me to suggest how Bahrain's labouring class might

be organised. I didn't know. I could not explain why Bapco's parent and affiliated companies in the States were highly unionised, a plethora of oil unions covering all trades and grades, while here we had not a trace of organisation. I supposed that, seeing the ruler banned union organisation, one might set up a friendly or benevolent society and then develop it industrially. The 'Social Services Society' seemed like an appropriate vehicle, I said. Al Bakr nodded. "We will start a trade union, but we must step slowly," he said.

He and his friends wanted democratic government brought about by non-violent means. Their open ended programme included the dismissal of Belgrave, introduction of income tax, more resources for health and education services, especially in the shia villages, and a curb on land grabbing by the Khalifas who were using their new oil wealth to add to their huge land bank in town and rural areas.

Hasan Al Jishy added moral cleansing to the list. He claimed that one-third of Manama municipality was occupied by sluts and that prostitution was officially recognised. "Girls get a chit from the Government authorising them to carry on, and parents cannot do a thing about it. In Saudi Arabia they would be whipped," he said.

Abdul Rahman's reforms included sweeping away traditions like the awesome Muharram ceremony, which had nothing to do with Islamic religion and was uncivilised. He wanted stricter control of rapacious landlords and crafty shopkeepers who charged different prices to American, British, Indian and Arab customers. In theory, traders set prices and refused to haggle, but he could get things for half the price I paid. Dealers put a 100 per cent mark up on cars.

Demands for changes also came from the merchant class, spurred on by self-interest. When Cable and Wireless, which provided the telephone service, decided to charge for calls - originally the only charge was for hiring equipment - the Chamber of Commerce called on the Government to nationalise the company.

The Kanoos claimed to desire change too, although they were careful to speak only good of the ruler and Belgrave. They regarded themselves as part of the machinery of government, as in a way Ahmed was as an elected Manama councillor. Mohammed Kanoo lowered his voice as he told me in his office, "Between ourselves...

we have leading merchants and senior Bahraini officials in the Government come here to a majles on Friday mornings. We drink coffee and talk over events, and then I go to His Highness or to Russell Brown and tell them what the people are saying."

Local government coincided with education, both started in 1919 under the presidency of Shaikh Abdulla. Manama was the first municipality, followed by Muharraq and Hedd, and its revenue came from taxes on shops, houses and vehicles, fees on slaughter houses, rents on council properties and miscellaneous dues. Manama's expenditure (in 1951, a fraction over half a million rupees or £38,227) covered such items as town cleaning and lighting, fire service, road works, public gardens and pauper burials. The council was keen to see barastis replaced by stone houses but noted that exorbitant land prices discouraged the building of small houses which would not yield high rents. The Government discussed with the municipality a scheme for small cheap houses for low paid workers and a row was built as a pilot project. Plain, solid walled structures, they looked to me like public conveniences. Pinhey commented that they would not catch on because Arabs preferred barastis which they could share with their chickens and goats.

Manama Municipality, initially opposed by important landowners who feared their vested interests would be affected, used the ballot box as early as 1926, when an electoral register of house tax payers was compiled. Foreigners - Muslim, Hindu and Jewish - regarded as more progressive, held a majority of seats for a time.

The council consisted of 24 members - half elected, half appointed by the ruler - with Shaikh Abdulla president, Shaikh Daij vice-president and a secretary. In 1950, the public elected two shia Arabs, five sunni Arabs, two Indians, a sunni Saudi and a sunni Persian. The Government appointed three shia Arabs, five sunni Arabs, two Indians, one Saudi and an Iraqi.

The following year dispute arose over a compensation payment for a sunni religious property and the shia councillors resigned in protest. A later dispute led the sunni Arabs to quit. The Government filled the vacancies with its own appointees.

Religious friction cropped up in various spheres, in public services, industry and commerce and the sunni ruler and his Government

were blamed for trying to strike sectarian balances instead of treating everyone as Bahrainis. Some said that an all-elected council would reflect the popular will, while others claimed that half the councillors were illiterate, and anyway, the municipality functioned best when the secretary, Mohammed Saleh Shatter, ran it on his own.

A chance for the political opposition to make its voice heard appeared when six British Members of Parliament arrived in January 1953. The three Conservative and three Labour members were not an official delegation but guests of a wealthy building contractor and Member of the Lebanese parliament, Emile Bustani. In the party were John Freeman (Labour) and Stephen McAdden (Conservative), both broadcasting personalities, and Barbara Castle, dubbed "the red head darling of the Left," whose inclusion was, in the words of ex-diplomat Pinhey, "much to everyone's horror."

I wrote to Mrs Castle intimating the sort of people she would be sure to see and inviting her to meet me and Al Bakr's friends. She promised to do her best. Unfortunately, Bahrain was the penultimate stop on a punishing three-week tour which took in visits to Palestinian refugee camps and protracted meetings with government and opposition leaders, diplomats and journalists in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. Three days of talks in Kuwait doubtless told them all they needed to know about the Gulf, so that their 24 hours in Bahrain could encompass dinner with His Highness, government people and Caltex New York bosses, a lightning inspection of the oil refinery and a brief shopping trudge in Manama.

From my point of view, the visit was a flop. Bustani provided a car so that I could catch up with the MPs on two occasions but they were too occupied to give time to me. Al Bakr's men were similarly rebuffed but they had, at my suggestion, prepared a statement which they handed to the delegation. One item, the ban on trade unions, at least struck a chord with the Labour members.

Visits of this kind presumably had a purpose and I asked Bustani what benefits had accrued from his conducted tour with British politicians a year earlier. He replied that he could not give all the details but Britain had agreed to increase the supply of jet warplanes to Iraq. Bustani, whose CAT Company employed 11,300 men, said

he planned to retire from the Beirut parliament in the mid 1950s, when the Lebanon should be in a sound economic condition and he could get back to his business. He never achieved that ambition, for an assassin's bullet got him.

Whatever impressions the visitors may have formed of Bahrain, their impact was nil. But I gained impressions that were to last. In Awali guest house, as the MPs filled in time with small talk, McAdden recounted with a nervous chuckle an incident as they prepared for dinner with the shaikh. Mrs Castle had trouble with the back zip of her long dress. "Do me up," she pleaded from her bedroom door. The Tory MP obliged.

Fifteen years later, in the Labour Party's conference hotel at Blackpool, a Fleet Street reporter burst into the bar at dinner time, breathless with excitement. "Guess what!" Fellow pressmen waited, agog. He had just walked from his upstairs room to the lift when Barbara Castle, now a Minister, stopped him at her door. She had on an evening gown with a back zip. Smiling sweetly, she said to the journalist, "Young man, do me up, will you?"

"That's funny, when I was in Bahrain..." The words were on the tip of my tongue but I did not utter them. Why spoil the young man's moment of triumph?

Another in the delegation, a swaggering giant retired with the rank of brigadier, tried to haggle with Bastaki in his Manama store over the price of some decorated ashtrays. Told they were fixed price, the MP snorted and said it was damned robbery. He picked up his purchase and put the money on the counter. Then, apparently thinking he was unobserved, he took back a 10-rupee note. The shopkeeper went to remonstrate, but the MP had dashed out of the door. In the street, he told me - more instruction than request - to take him to a pearl merchant. We went to Al Zain's, where the young son Ali took out hundreds of pearls from his safe and poured them into a mound on his desk: tiny seed pearls and many outsize, from top quality pale rose to lesser valued white, pink, yellow, blue and black. The visitor leaned forward in his chair to feel the smooth lustre with his hands and covetous eyes. "How much is this one?" he asked, fingering a perfect sphere. "Six hundred rupees."

"That's 45 pounds," I interjected. I thought the huge MP was going to start haggling again. "I expect you'll have to pay a hefty duty in England," I added.

"Nonsense!" he snapped. "We're Members of Parliament. The Customs don't bother us."

He liked the pearls but not the prices and left empty handed.

A week later, The Spectator carried an article by Barbara Castle describing wretched conditions in the refugee camps, the political background, the rival claims of Arab and Jew and economic development in the Jordan Valley. She also gave an opinion then fashionable, "The refugee camps are the shop window of Arab grievances, and many Arab politicians want to keep them so. As one extremist among many put it to us: 'I do not want to see the refugees resettled. I want them to remain in the camps as a symbol of the cruel injustice inflicted by the West on the Arab world.'"

The article enraged Ali Tajer and Hasan Jishy. Ali, shaking as he fulminated against the Jews, said, "We shall unite and throw them out of Palestine. We are not afraid!" Hasan butted in, "Yes, even if it takes fifty years we shall throw them out!"

I suggested there was little sign of Arab unity five years after Israel declared independence. Ali Tajer shouted, "You - America and Britain - got us into this mess, you must get us out of it. You will throw the Jews out because we will tell you to do so!"

The grimly prescient headline on the article read : REFUGEES FOR EVER. Not until 40 years later, in September 1993, when the Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, and Palestine Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat signed their historic peace accord was a glimmer of hope given to refugees, some at least.

Four months before my contract expired, Berdine asked if I planned to come back for a second term. How extraordinary!

Everyone else knew I would not be returning. I had repeatedly told them so. What had gone wrong with personnel department's grapevine or spy system that Berdine did not know? In any case, I had assumed the management would not want me back after all our skirmishes. I could have told Berdine straight: "I won't be back." Instead I said, "I think you had better work on the assumption that I won't be back."

He wanted a firmer answer. I refused to give one. He was somewhat put out. He closed my dossier, rose and straightened his bearlike frame. "We'll have to talk about it later," he said.

I discussed the conversation with my office cronies. One thought Berdine had been fishing. He had not signed my replacement yet, so he was stringing me along. Another claimed to have seen an advert in The Telegraph for my job. Another said he understood the late editor from Abadan was to take charge of the Islander.

One thing they were all agreed on: next time I saw Berdine I should tell him that I expected to return but couldn't be definite at this stage. I thought that was going too far. This was a game, the employee's one chance to play with management, to keep them guessing. But dishonesty? No. When Berdine asked me again about my plans, I repeated my earlier formula. He still seemed to be indicating that I could return, so I waited to hear what improvement in salary and accommodation he could offer. Instead, he said, "If the editor's job is filled when you get back, we can find other work for you."

That seemed a bit of cheek. He was not saying whether he had demotion or something better in mind. I did not ask. It was irrelevant, I wasn't coming back. He did not push me. He did not say the management wanted me to come back. It was up to me to say I would return. I would not say Berdine was devious (any more than I was!) but he could have told me my replacement was on the way.

Between interviews, in mid January, I wrote a sharp memo to Berdine. The management, without saying why, instructed me henceforth to submit Letters to them before publication. I countered: "Now that I have no responsibility for anything published in the Bahrain Islander, there is no point in my name appearing on the front page."

Berdine passed my note round with his own scribbled observation: "I don't follow HVM's reasoning...However, if he wishes to leave his name off front page, I would not object. This seems to me to be a manifestation of a very poor attitude on Mr Mapp's part, which has been evident to me for some time." At last, the break was total, we had come to the end of the road, no turning back.

In the opening months of 1953, the UK was visited by weather of the cruellest kind: impenetrable, choking fog, icy conditions accompanied by an acute shortage of heating fuel and then the disastrous floods that claimed hundreds of lives and devastated Canvey Island, not far from my home town.

In Bahrain, where I heard the grim news by radio, winter was basically sunshine and more sunshine, 80 degrees on Christmas Day and only intermittent drizzle to dampen an eight-month drought. Then tragedy struck. And the only really dramatic story of my Bapco career I told anonymously because, in my fit of measured pique, I had just expunged 'H V Mapp, Editor' from the Islander.

Under the heading MANAMA RESIDENTIAL AREA DESTROYED BY FIRE - HUNDREDS LOSE HOMES, I wrote about the black Monday, February 2nd.

The morning opened with a leaden sky, so unlike the customary cloudless, pale blue skies. Conditions akin to summer which we had enjoyed throughout the winter, almost free from wind and rain, changed suddenly and the air turned chill. Then the shamaal sprang up and approaching gale force whipped flurries of sand and blinding dust from the north, at times restricting visibility to a few yards. In the afternoon, as the sun strove to penetrate the low dust clouds, the yellowness all around resembled a London fog.

That night, approaching midnight, in a thickly populated area near the Godaybia Palace, an elderly blind man knocked over an oil lamp, which set fire to a barasti wall. Another man woke up and guided the blind man to safety. There were no means of tackling the fire, no water. It took hold and spread. The palm thatch huts, built wall to wall in clusters and dry as tinder, were rapidly engulfed by flames whipped by the fierce wind into a blow torch. Relentlessly the blaze spread, shooting crackling flames towards the black night sky. The Manama fire brigade arrived speedily to face what was in a sense a forest fire out of control.

The firemen managed to some extent to contain it, but acres from which families had fled were devastated. Embers smouldered throughout the night and dawn revealed a sea of black ashes strewn with broken pots and glassware, twisted metal pans and ragged barasti walls torn frantically from burning homes.

In late morning, bright overhead but cold, the scene was grim. Knots of elderly women, shrouded in black, squatted among the debris, some silent, others moaning or perhaps saying a prayer between drawing on cigarettes. Old men and youths raked with their feet among mounds of ash, vainly hoping to salvage something of value, perhaps a memento. It was pitiful. A chilling breeze scattered over the victims fine ashes that were once their homes. Those who had little now had nothing. Talking quietly among themselves, they betrayed no emotion.

The worst fire for many years destroyed nearly 200 homes. Remarkably, not one of the 800 homeless suffered injury. Relief work started immediately. Aramco sent 50 tents from Saudi Arabia, the oil company in Qatar sent 20. Bapco provided mattresses and blankets and 10,000 rupees. Sympathy for the victims was not unanimous in Awali, but an appeal to families resulted in scouts and guides collecting 14 crates of clothing and domestic utensils (besides two crates sent to flood victims in England). A casino night in the club raised 5,000 rupees for relief.

A disaster relief committee was set up with Ahmed Fakhroo chairman, and one merchant took on responsibility for feeding and sheltering 80 victims. Al Bakr's society seized on the chance to show itself and began collecting and distributing money and clothing. But the Government ordered the society to drop out and leave aid to Fakhroo's organisation. Jishy suspected that a body of merchants, including the Kanoos, had prevailed on the Government to bar the society because it was proving that sunnis and shias could work in harmony. The homeless included 34 Bapco employees and these were taken to the suq in Manama to be kitted out, at company expense, with two sets of khaki shirts and slacks, a zip jacket, two pairs of socks, a pair of boots and a 'gutrah,' headkerchief. Each was also given two blankets and a 40 lb bag of rice. Crowds in the bazaar stood around and marvelled at this dispensation. It was, said Squires, a propaganda coup for Bapco.

Here, alas, the story did not end. On Friday, 13th of February, three barasti fires occurred in Manama and one in Muharraq. One, in a compound opposite the public health building, meant the loss of 20 homes. Barasti fires were not uncommon, perhaps 25 in a year,

but this sudden spate bore the marks of arson. Jishy said it was believed that Muscatis had been starting fires to loot homes during the panic. By the end of the month, the relief committee collected 52,000 rupees from merchants. An appeal to banks and major firms claimed that 292 houses had been destroyed and nearly 2,000 people made destitute.

In the absence of a competent and reliable news service, the fires were the subject of rumour, speculation and malicious gossip, apart from the political dimension. After five years without a local press, the monthly Voice of Bahrain started in 1950 and the Government's annual report noted that it was edited by a committee of young men, was approved by the Government and was intended to be non political. "Its first issues contained articles of more or less general interest as well as poems," commented Belgrave.

Criticism of the Government and the oil company was to come, giving a lead to two Arabic newspapers, Al Qafila and Al Khamila, which were launched towards the end of 1952. Apparently the ruler had been dispensing largesse again, for Ebrahim al Moayyed, owner of Al Khamila, said in effect, "His Highness gave us two rooms in Manama and 1,500 rupees to start the paper and told us to keep quiet about his Government."

To Al Bakr, the Voice was no mere literary vehicle. On his travels, he visited the various oil companies and interviewed executives for the magazine. He formed the impression that Aramco was far ahead of Bapco in improving working and social conditions, as well as wages, for Arab employees and he hammered the point that promotion in Bahrain was too slow.

It was said that Al Bakr had been called in by the ruler for consultation on negotiations for revising the Bapco royalty agreement though he did not mention this to me. Many people were exercised by what they regarded as the Government's poor reward from the industry, believing that in striking a hard bargain the oil men had handed the Government a raw deal.

Until 1950, Bapco paid 3½ rupees royalty for each ton of crude oil extracted from Bahrain. Aramco paid Ibn Saud 10 rupees (75p), the going rate in some other Gulf states. But the really profitable part of Bapco operations, processing Saudi oil, earned nothing for the

Bahrain Government. Bapco and Aramco being largely one company within Caltex, they could decide between themselves a price for refining oil and how much profit Bapco should make on it. The Government gained none of this and did not - as it might have done with a stronger negotiating hand - charge Bapco rent for the land on which the refinery and extensive attendant services stood.

Al Bakr claimed the Voice was making a measured approach to advancement for Bahrainis, unlike the rival papers which were going too fast and whipping up feeling, more racist than principled, on trivial issues.

For some months, Charles Belgrave and the director of education censored the three publications and in Manama there was tension in the air. Censorship became time consuming, so a new measure was introduced. Belgrave signed a notice on 15 February 1953 warning that anyone printing, publishing or selling seditious matter would face up to two years imprisonment and a 1,500 rupee fine. The order added, "Matter calculated to excite tumult or disorder or to excite enmity between subjects of Bahrain and others or between different classes of person or persons belonging to different religious sects or between the Ruler and his subjects shall be deemed seditious matter."

Publications now needed a Government licence specifying the name of the paper, its owner, printer, publisher and editors. A licence could be refused without any stated reason or be granted subject to conditions. Anything published without a licence could be confiscated, along with the printing press. A breach of conditions might mean forfeiture of a 2,000-rupee deposit.

Consternation among the intelligentsia naturally followed. Such Draconian measures were unwarranted. Ahmed Kanoo criticised the decree. "Better to let people say what they think," he said. His brother said everyone was blaming Bapco for the move.

Hasan Jishy asked what I thought should be done. "Carry on as usual," I replied. "If the Government do prosecute, you can kick up a real fuss." He said a friend had said much the same thing.

It was brave of me to invite the Voice editorial committee to publish and be damned, for I wouldn't go to jail. But I was smarting over the Bapco management's attitude. They failed to tell me of the

Government's ordinance - I got a copy of Belgrave's public notices as usual via the back door - and I understood they had applied for a licence for the Islander, again without telling me, still nominally editor. In the event, all three Arabic publications closed down, pending discussions with Belgrave.

When I got out my last issue of the Islander, I felt no emotional pangs, no sense of anguish or elation. My achievements had been modest: a simple, tidy product which gave our readers what the management felt they ought to know; the introduction of more Awali community news and the letters column which regrettably failed to live up to my expectations. Overall, with the inclusion of pictures, it was a slightly livelier publication, yet it could have been so much more if officialdom, in the company and outside, had not frustrated my efforts and curiosity. They appeared to be telling me to mind my own business and leave theirs alone.

It was a pity that we - the management and I - had never had a serious discussion about the Islander, its purpose and content. At heart, nobody in authority wanted to take responsibility for it. And I, who started and ended as an 'unclassified stenographer,' was in reality a mere collator of information and stencil cutter. All those fine words in training classrooms - "Pat the man on the back...Put him in the picture" - added up to so much hogwash. The "new editor in chief," Josephson had called me. What a laugh!

Strangely enough, my departure was the signal for significant developments. My successor as caretaker editor, Phil King, of travel section, knew all about them and informed me: a striking new front page masthead, a new format and printing done commercially at Al Moayyed's in Manama. And an Arabic edition!

A fine idea, dressing up in new clothes, but would they merely hide an insubstantial form beneath? What was needed was news. That was obvious to me, but I suppose the management had to think otherwise, their job being to win and sell oil, not to disseminate news and unwittingly stir up controversy in the process. And when I considered my compatriots in Awali, the workers and their wives, were they at all interested in the life and times about them? How many, I wondered, had come to Bahrain in large measure to get

away from it all, to isolate and insulate themselves from a disagreeable world?

"You have nothing to fear but fear itself," President Roosevelt had said. My bosses ignored that hint. They appeared to me to be forever looking over their shoulders, alarmed that they might by some injudicious remark or act offend the board in New York, the shaikh in his palace, the Brits in their diplomatic quarters.

The hidebound attitude of the censors had manifested itself at Christmas when the Rev Rickells submitted a seasonal message, not out of keeping with the little wayside pulpit pieces that the *Islander* had carried occasionally over the years. Islam had been given rather more space.

"The Spirit of Christmas is to me the Spirit of Peace," Rickells wrote. "On the first Christmas Eve the angels' song of 'peace on earth, good will towards men' rang out." He developed his theme with appropriate biblical imagery.

First to censor, Bob Squires scrawled alongside, "I personally question the advisability of printing this and other Christian philosophies in a Muslim country and believe that good taste, if nothing else, would indicate that we should keep our religious items and ideologies out of print so far as possible."

Denny Berdine wrote: "Agree, especially in view of fact we'll be getting 'Christmas messages' of a non-religious character from members of our own management."

Topmost of the unholy trinity, L A Smith added: "Agree, but Rickells could write something less likely to cause comment."

I did not agree. It was my job to tell the priest that his work was not fit to print. I told him, "I'm terribly sorry, we didn't have space for it."

I was not ungrateful to the American Squires. With a party of bachelors, I was invited to his home on Christmas Day. Besides demolishing a giant turkey, we drank copiously and sang bawdy songs. It was richly pagan and none but the most intolerant of Muslims could have objected.

Like a gestation period, my Gulf stint saw the birth of a host of developments presaged by the Iranian crisis. Arab gains, or at least changes, included new wage structures, improved accommodation,

the management-worker committee and breaching of the western citadel, the club. Now, as I prepared to leave, Awali's first horticultural show was about to burst into bloom by courtesy of the newly formed Londoners' Society. Australian and New Zealand expats formed an association for cultural celebrations. Over a hundred women, wives and staff, put their names down for a tour of the refinery. Awali primary school's first parent-teacher association was due to hold its inaugural monthly meeting and the company urged parents to attend and ask questions. Radicalism run riot!

And Awali camp - now officially styled village - possessed for so long of a place of Christian worship now had a mosque, for both sunni and shia, built by Bapco. It bore the name of Shaikh Sulman who opened it and expressed himself well pleased.

He was delighted too with the new Bapco prep school for Bahrainis, built by the company at a cost of 120,000 US dollars. Superior to any state school, it had four classrooms, two staff offices, a lunch room and showers. An adjoining technical school was in the planning stage. Specialist staff being engaged included a Lebanese to teach Arabic to Arabs and to some Awali youngsters.

His Highness said Bapco should have publicised its training of Bahrainis. Brown said the company had advertised its various benefits in Voice of Bahrain, but now this had refused to carry Bapco adverts.

Rounding off his Awali tour with coffee in the guest house, the ruler suddenly found his tongue. At numerous previous meetings I had scarcely seen his lips move. Now, with Belgrave absent and Hussain Yateem translating, he was positively garrulous. Richly robed as ever, he might almost have been smiling behind his heavy beard. He appeared intensely happy, perhaps at the prospect of going to London for the coronation. He asked Murray, the company's London director, what England was like. And what about the Comet aircraft? Questions, questions. He returned to education and could not say enough good things about Brown and Skinner.

During farewell handshakes, he had a plea to make to Bapco: get more crude oil from Arabia for the Bahrain refinery!

In my final days, I stuck rigidly to routine. On Monday night, under a starlit roof, I enjoyed the film Pat and Mike, starring

Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy. Tuesday night was tennis, Wednesday band practice and on Thursday my last dance was quite a success. The ARTS staged one of their best productions and I gave them praise which was less than graciously received, for I was not yet rehabilitated in thespian minds.

A few days of heavy rain formed lakes which refused to disperse on the rock surfaces of Manama. Barasti compounds stood forlornly marooned, but it was fine for mosquitoes.

I went into town to see my Arab friends for the last time, to glean the latest political gossip and to say goodbye. They said they were sorry I would not be returning, as did the Arabs and Indians I worked alongside in Bapco. I decided not to give a farewell party for my friends in Awali. It probably looked mean, but where could I entertain? The bunkhouse was out of the question.

A new message from New York said that "a rearrangement of the budget" meant putting back the 1953-54 housebuilding programme to 1955. Tough luck on the guys still coming out: if they stayed the course, they faced three years in the bunkhouse...

13 Kuwait to Beirut

ALI, personnel department driver, took me to the end of the cargo cluttered customs pier in Manama and handed over my baggage as I stepped on to the launch. After two years, with a wealth of experience and memories, I was putting Bahrain behind me.

"Fi aman illah!" Goodbye, God go with you! Ali and I shook hands. He was a good driver and a friendly colleague, a tall, dark young Arab with a film star's good looks. As the launch headed to sea and the distance from the shore lengthened, he stood clad head to toe in white with arm raised to wave, like a receding Statue of Liberty, not exactly an apt symbol.

This March morning theoretically belonged to winter, but the sun beamed heat from cloudless heavens. Salt spray borne on a faint breeze stung perspiring faces. Wooden dhows creaked at their moorings. Then we came alongside the towering steel hull of the British India ship Dumra and a dozen European passengers started the shaky ascent of the gangway.

Slow, if entertaining, the transshipment by numerous small craft of passengers of divers races and a miscellany of cargo, industrial equipment, sacks of flour, bicycles and a lone lavatory pan, detained the ship till late afternoon. My destination was Kuwait. An aircraft could have made several return trips even before we set off for a dawdling lap to Ras Tanura on the Arabian coast.

A second night was spent afloat before, at first light, the ship anchored a couple of miles from the Kuwait Oil Company's wharves at Mina al Ahmadi, which lay hidden by a chill mist. For hours, anxious passengers sat fretfully listening to the mournful monotone of a foghorn until in mid-afternoon the sun broke through to reveal the maritime scene around us. Then, by the time we tied up at the clean and orderly pier, the mist thickened again.

From the dockside phone, I called an Iraqi Christian for whom I had a letter of introduction from his brother in law, Thomas Simon.

He had a professional job in KOC and would provide a bed for a couple of nights, Simon had assured me in Manama.

The relative was puzzled by my call and no clearer when I arrived by taxi at his neat bungalow in Ahmadi, the oil town. He invited me in and served coffee. He had no warning about me and as he read the letter I produced his face clouded. I guessed what was coming. "I'm sorry," he said, haltingly, "I am afraid I cannot offer you hospitality."

I sought no reason, wishing not to embarrass him, certain that the difficulty was as much race as space. "I understand," I said.

A car whisked me and my traps to the KOC's Hubara Club, a sumptuous establishment where, from a choice of eight meat dishes, I had a good dinner for a mere five shillings, half the Awali rate.

What chance of a bed for the night? I put the plea to the club manager, who looked at me askance. No, no, not possible. Was there no odd corner in the club where I might shake down? No. The manager could not put me up in his own quarters. He felt sure nobody else could. However, he canvassed my plight and a club member took me to his well appointed bachelor home in a block of flats and I slept on cushions on his lounge floor.

Kuwait was in the grip of boom: fabulous income matched by lavish spending. The American and British partners, Gulf Oil and Anglo-Iranian, set up KOC in 1933 but left commercial operating till the end of the war in 1945. Crude oil production of less than one million tons in 1946 shot ahead to a rate of 40 million tons a year when I dropped in, yielding the Government around a million pounds sterling a week; Bahrain's revenue for a whole year.

Oil field life was harsher, the climate less tolerable, than in Bahrain. But there was more welfare, a shorter working week of 42 hours, longer holidays, higher pay and, for western staff at least, allowances that exceeded tax-free salaries. Everything was on a grander scale. I looked in awe at the facilities for producing the company's daily paper and weekly magazine.

The company bus on its afternoon journey to Kuwait Town followed a straight, wide asphalt road once clear of Ahmadi, past a village of crude and dirty shanties, many built of steel from old oil drums. Flat semi-desert on either hand provided a scattering of

spiky tufts of grass for nibbling sheep and goats watched over by herdsmen on lofty camels.

This was a country of ill defined boundaries, crossed at will by nomadic tribesmen who owed no allegiance to any national state, with neutral zones between Kuwait and its neighbours, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, in which the governments shared oil wealth. Kuwait, in the feudal grasp of the Al Sabah family for over two centuries, was bursting out of its medieval past.

Ruling a population estimated at 100,000, the majority in Kuwait Town, Shaikh Abdulla, a man of frugal habits, had appointed a board of British experts to develop the country. Shuwaikh, on the coast between the oil town and the capital, till recently baked desert, lay under a rising, billowing cloud of dust. Thrusting picks and shovels and hungrily biting giant excavators carved into rock faces; a thousand lorry wheels ploughed deep ruts along the unpaved road from Kuwait Town. Industry, amazing and frenzied, was giving shape to projects worth many millions of pounds. The £2m plant for distilling a million gallons of sea water daily, reducing the need to bring tins of fresh water by boat from Iraq, was on the verge of completion.

Engineers, surveyors, craftsmen and labourers, Arabs in cotton skirts raised and tied round the waist, shirtless Britons and Italians, and Indians in starched khaki-drill suits worked with incredible gusto. On his first day, a young Indian clerk I met on the boat from Bahrain took me into his half-built office cabin which shook under the hammering, sawing and banging going on all around. Puzzled, almost frightened, he shouted: "I did not expect this when I left Bombay. I cannot work - or think - and I don't understand what is happening."

Kuwait Town, still partly hemmed in by a defensive boundary wall, was no less a hive of activity. Anything built two years earlier was old, thus "the old TB hospital" and "the old secondary school." The new versions, larger and grander, were nearly ready. The old TB hospital was a simple, low structure isolated in the desert, caring for 280 in-patients and nearly 500 out-patients from all parts of the Gulf. The Iraqi doctor in charge was proud of the vast gleaming kitchens, the spacious operating theatre and a radiological

department with "probably the most modern equipment in the whole Middle East."

New roads, public buildings and palaces were rapidly changing the face of the capital, though the scars, crude houses of coral and mud or palm thatch, remained. There were also, I had been told, two hotels. The problem was finding them. I made inquiries in the bazaar to no avail. Al Bakr had given me names of some of his Kuwaiti contacts, all of whom denied the existence of any hotels. When I persisted, one eventually admitted there were two hotels of sorts, but he added, "You would be well advised to leave Kuwait before nightfall."

The better of the two was in a garbage strewn lane of tall houses with mud caked walls which shared glaring sunlight and heavy shadows. A bright green ornamental facade gave 'The Modern Hotel' a misleading superiority over its neighbours. An arched gateway led into a dusty courtyard littered with hard chairs, a pail or two and tanks of water heated over charcoal embers. A narrow stairway on one wall gave access to the upper storey and the bedrooms, twelve of them, set around a railed balcony overlooking the courtyard.

I booked a room, fairly spacious with a lofty decorated ceiling, poor rugs partly covering the cracked stone floor, and decrepit furniture. A light bulb flickered weakly after dark, but the bed was comfortable. On the balcony were stationed a number of tall washstands with cracked mirrors and taps to create the illusion of piped water. Abuse addressed to the machines when nothing came out should have been directed at the boy whose job it was to fill a tank hidden behind. To bathe, one got a bucket of hot water from the yard and adjourned to a closet where patches of cardboard over holes in the outer wall kept the wind at bay. The lavatories, for squatters and sitters, were foul.

It was not cheap at 50 shillings a day and the dinner I had was poor, a thin soup, a chop and cold tinned vegetables, tinned fruit and tepid tea. Fellow guests, a small band of British sales reps, Indian clerks and Italian stonemasons, said it was a feast after what they had been served all week.

The British commercial travellers accepted temporary discomfort because Kuwait was, said one, "A market just waiting to be cleaned up." A haberdasher, surrounded in his room by a mountain of trade samples, boxes of shirts and underwear, said he had taken orders worth £40,000 in less than a week.

Two salesmen who had been summoned by a young shaikh to help him choose furnishings for his new palace showed me presents given by him, gold watches for themselves and diamond clasps for their wives. One said he had casually mentioned that he needed to cash a cheque and the young shaikh opened a safe stuffed with notes and announced, "You want money? Here is plenty."

I blundered when I booked a seat for Basra. A clerk in the transport office said at nine o'clock that I had just missed the morning bus and should squeeze into a shared taxi for £2. When I demurred, he said I could have a taxi to myself for £10. No, no, I said, I wanted to travel in the £1 bus. He thought I was being foolish, but if I insisted I should come back in the afternoon.

The bus was a truck chassis, to which benches were fixed, the whole under a canvas hood. It was not comfortable, but I felt I could bear it for the few hours the journey was supposed to take. I took a seat at 2 o'clock on a hot afternoon but the driver did not appear until about 5pm. He made two trips round the inner walls of Kuwait Town calling "Basra! Basra!" and then returned to the terminus for more passengers.

We were at least 20 strong, terribly cramped, when the vehicle eventually left. An elderly man was ejected for not having the fare. The driver stopped at CID to get our documents stamped. A security man told us all to alight for screening, then half way through changed his mind. Everybody climb in! We had another halt for the driver to buy chappatis and then, outside the walls, the featureless desert was all ours.

A youth sitting next to me had been smoking heavily and soon paid the price of the experiment, becoming sick. Ignoring frantic pleas from passengers to stop, the driver raced on, and we had the curious spectacle of an old wrinkled Arab standing on the running board, one hand clutching the open door, the other grasping the hair of a

boy hanging out and vomiting violently, whilst other hands kept a tight grip on his coat tails.

Cold night was coming in. I was inadequately clad and wind penetrating peepholes in the canvas chilled me to the marrow. The driver must have lost his way in the black, trackless desert for instructions were shouted at him from time to time. In the middle of nowhere, the neutral zone, where a compass would not have come amiss, we made two halts to drop off two or three travellers.

Two hours after midnight the vehicle stopped and everyone stiffly alighted. Thank goodness, Basra. We should have been there hours ago. In fact, this was only Safwan, the border customs post. The post was closed, in darkness. On a verandah, Iraqi guards were snoring under heavy greatcoats and blankets. A guard with a rifle stole a blanket from a sleeping figure and handed it to me. I went back to the bus but it was too cold and too uncomfortable for sleep. With others, I mooched around, smoking, restoring circulation, anxiously awaiting sunrise and warmth.

Daylight disclosed we were in a courtyard enclosed by stone buildings set among trees. Beyond the gates lay the small, lonely village of Safwan, an irregular collection of mud huts surrounded by dried droppings of the inhabitants.

Outside the gates, a small coffee shop opened at dawn. It was made of scrap sheet metal and mud, its greasy, blackened walls holed in places to provide ventilation and a little light. My travelling companions beckoned me to the seat of honour, next to a paraffin stove heating water for our refreshment. They had been hospitable, offering me biscuits and stale chappati during the night. Now they ordered several rounds of sweet, black tea, served in midget glasses, for none of which I was allowed to pay. I handed round some cigars and saw three wrecked because my demonstration of piercing an end with a matchstick was incorrectly copied.

After two hours, we returned to the security compound and I was summoned to the office of the commandant, a youngish portly figure dressed like a British army captain. He motioned me to a chair and said I should have spent the night in the officers' quarters. My presence was acceptable, he explained over coffee and cigarettes, for opportunities of exercising his English were all too rare. I sought his

views on the Government and conditions in Iraq and received frank answers. He was interested in knowing where I had been and where I was going and I thought his friendly concern for my welfare touching. He wrote a long passage in Arabic on a slip of paper and tucked it into my passport and returned it to me. He wished me good luck and told a soldier to lead me to another office where two civilian officials, breakfasting on a cold diet of curried lamb and tomatoes, with coffee, urged me to help myself. The fare was hardly delicious but in my famished state I could feel nothing but gratitude.

It was a week later, in Baghdad, that I learned the pencilled note explained how I entered Iraq without a valid visa. My affable chat with the commandant must have been an interrogation and, considering the political climate, the questions I asked could well have been indiscreet.

Before departure, I chipped in a couple of rupees to the collection taken by my fellow travellers..."for the Customs officers." It appeared to be a regional practice which helped to stay the zeal of officials searching for contraband. (Later, in Damascus, an official returned my passport with two tickets for a football match to be played after my leaving. They were part of the fee he had charged for my exit visa, he explained. He thought my protest churlish.)

At Safwan we picked up two new passengers, a woman in black and her daughter and, though heat was intensifying, a biting wind rushed through the vehicle. The child, in front of me, shivered. I had a blanket, my own property, and I was about to place it over the girl's shoulders when the mother observed my gesture and gave an aggressive scowl. Just you dare!

The last stage of the journey was all warmth and smiles, exchanging of cigarettes and small talk in basic Arabic and English. As we rumbled into the Basra suburb of Ashar, Kuwait, 20 hours distant, was forgotten.

Ashar was a disturbing contrast of fashionable and fetid, of modern offices, estates of villas and night clubs, grubby bazaars, and shanties erected among groves of stately palms where potbellied infants romped amid their own faeces.

Worn out by the wretched trip from Kuwait, I slept soundly in an extremely modest hotel to which I repaired after refusing a passing

taxi driver's invitation to what in the Navy was called "Exhibish," an entertainment where women performed unusual feats with animals.

Basra to Baghdad was about 350 miles or 15 hours by the night train. It was tediously slow, yet comfortable in the second class compartment shared with an Iraqi merchant. First an attendant made up beds with crisp sheets on the spacious upholstered seats, then he served a meal of soup, fried chicken, dessert and coffee. In the morning, he brought early tea and later a substantial fried breakfast. An unusually civilised experience, the whole excursion cost £4 and I was not surprised the line ran at a loss.

My sense of well being contrasted with the seething anger of another Englishman, a Unesco official, that I met in the corridor. He had boarded at an obscure halt and finding his carriage locked, he stood all night in the draughty toast-rack third class. Now he was having trouble obtaining breakfast. I asked him about the political situation and he became agitated. All these young men coming out of higher education and all they wanted to do was talk politics, politics!

The train puffed triumphantly into Baghdad, a city under martial law. Violence was instant. An old wretch and a youth, both in rags, picked up alighting passengers' heavy bundles and staggered towards waiting taxis. A gang of porters, presumably authorised, pounced on the pair, forcing surrender of their loads. Fists flew. Policemen appeared with batons drawn and after dealing a few blows to the protesting old man and boy bundled them into a station room for further treatment.

I had gained an impression over a number of years that it was easy to distinguish where French and British writs had run by the sanitary conditions. Damascus and Beirut, for example, struck me as generally clean and well ordered, their restaurants hygienically welcoming. Baghdad was a symbol of filth. You could hardly walk anywhere without treading in something. In crowded Rashid Street, a horse with an upper class polo player aloft might breathe down your neck on the pavement and then you would slither in a pile of dung. Once, a policeman in a busy street pressed himself against a shopfront and urinated. In a government ministry, crowded with

bureaucrats, one who claimed he had acquired his frightfully genteel accent in an English university pushed back his chair, bowed his head and expectorated on the floor under his desk with a slow deliberation that hinted he was expecting a round of applause.

A rascally hotel tout led me from the railway station to the aptly named Sham Palace, near a bridge over the Tigris. At ten shillings a night, it was not a dosshouse I would have recommended. It stood with ramshackle shops in King Faisal II Street, an unswept main thoroughfare with pot holed pavements, an area that not only smelled like a farmyard but had a cow, with its calf, tethered to a pillar supporting my hotel's porch. The old crone in charge, at suitable intervals, draped sacking over the beast's rump and, with a funnel and a quart bottle, went under cover to relieve the cow and produce fresh milk for the next passing customer.

Eroticism and violence appeared as essentials to life in Baghdad. Posters and photos outside cinemas made the point. In a night club called Arabian Nights Cabaret that I left after an hour, seeing no particular attraction in the belly dancers and hostesses, an army sergeant and two men removed a customer who carried a curved sword. When I left, an armed soldier standing guard at the cabaret entrance trailed me almost back to my hotel, which I took to be thoughtful regard for my safety.

In the city's teeming streets, alleyways and bazaars and on the rivers, all conditions of life fused and shattered as in a kaleidoscope. The centre of fairy tale and legend, learning and culture, had slipped its mask to reveal the face of ignorance, illiteracy and poverty.

The nation approaching six million people, a million in Baghdad and another million of troublesome Kurds in the north, had acquired its first full year of half profits from the oil industry. The national development board, with British and American advisers, supposedly independent of government, now had scores of millions of pounds to invest in restructuring the country. A little of that wealth would have helped the beggars on the streets and the waifs with cupped hands besieging restaurant doors for bread or scraps left on plates. The masses of unskilled labourers putting in too many hours for too little pay surely qualified for assistance. Everything had to be fitted into a strategy. Visible early fruits included new palaces and

mosques, stylish homes for the middle class, and lavish office blocks and purpose built factories in the suburbs. In the pipeline were hospitals, schools, colleges, irrigation projects, roads, bridges, museums and public utilities, all providing good jobs for foreign specialists. And in the determination of priorities, politics and religion demanded a say.

Iraq was relatively new. As ancient Mesopotamia, a cornerstone of the Ottoman Empire, it was freed from the Turks by the British in 1917. Now, in 1953, British arms and diplomacy still bolstered intrigue, propping up a shaky monarchy and governments led on and off for 25 years by Nuri Said. As parties of left and right juggled with feudalism and incipient democracy, it was difficult to judge what effect they had on the pressing need for modernising the economy and enhancing public well being.

Pinning intellectuals down to projecting a coherent programme of reform was not easy for an innocent abroad, for me. As in Bahrain, identifying ills was easier than finding cures. However, on the advice of Abdul Rahman Al Bakr, I visited a number of men whose names he had furnished, teachers, civil servants and a doctor. Also recommended was a senior police officer, but in the light of the political climate I deemed it sensible to give him a miss. The coronation of Faisal II on reaching 18 was due in May, only weeks away, though there was no sign of preparations, and until then martial law and bans on political parties and the press would remain.

The round up of so called enemies of the state, active nationalists and communists and distributors of anti-government leaflets, was unceasing, a schoolmaster told me. "At times there are twice as many political prisoners as criminals in the jails and not all of them get a trial. Some do not leave alive. Several of my boys were arrested and after summary trials they received long sentences as suspected communists. Absolute nonsense!"

Stories of brutal repression were commonplace. I met only one man prepared to defend the regime, a senior official in the Lord Mayor's department. "We have a wise Regent and a Government of experts. Laymen should not criticise," he asserted. But laymen I spoke to - businessmen, professionals and students - were at one in

condemning the Government, meaning the civil authority, the throne and the army. A political writer said, "Their handling of the internal situation is so inept that the public get restive. So the Government start a 'blame Britain' campaign to cloak their own shortcomings. The United Nations should send a commission to Iraq to investigate conditions and talk to the people, poor people who for all their illiteracy know the difference between good and evil."

To meet other critics of the system, I was directed to the Institute of Fine Arts, where I saw another side of Arab character. Only 50 of the 150 student places were filled, but the quality of painting, sculpting and European classical music demonstrated was impressive; so too a snatch of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar in Arabic performed by the drama coach, a former boxing champion.

An example of two races apart was shown by the military, the Sandhurst trained officers, tall, upright, paunch-developing, and the rank and file, a two-year conscripted rabble. I stopped and stared in disbelief as a platoon of soldiers marched in irregular step through a street in Baghdad. They were kitted out in British cast offs much too large for undersized, undernourished men of all ages, some with bent backs. The whole range of the quartermaster's store was paraded: tropical kit and winter battledress; long, short and midcalf trousers; even khaki shorts and puttees put on over long white combinations. Decidedly odd!

Cold and damp Baghdad I was pleased to quit. Too much squalor and the unending assaults: a soldier beating a cowering civilian, policemen striking beggar boys about the head, and a huge shopkeeper vigorously boxing the ears of a wretched old man suspected of stealing a crust of bread.

Damascus lay 22 hours away from Baghdad by bus on a route part paved, part cultivated, but largely desert scarred by ill defined tracks. Five short halts for sunset and first light prayers, customs checks and tea breaks provided the only relief for our driver-mechanic. He spoke little as he concentrated on maintaining his bearings and I was not surprised when he rubbed his eyes on reaching journey's end. The drivers who regularly made this gruelling trek were a friendly bunch, short, squat characters of around middle age, multilingual Iraqis. They were happy with their

lot, including 15 shillings a day wages, plus £1 a day away from home. My driver got me a room in his hotel and brought me a small bottle of potent grape arak, aniseed tasting and cloudy when diluted, which could not be drunk in the hotel lounge.

Physically attractive ancient Damascus was icy, in the disciplined grip of the elected dictator Shishekly. I sensed a hostility towards me, a foreigner.

One evening in the hotel, in the company of the drivers, a little Iraqi expatiated for my benefit on the subject of liberty. In Baghdad, he said, if you went to a cabaret and fancied the hostess you danced with, you could take her home for the night. But here, in Damascus, dance girls had to register with the police, who knocked at their homes during the night to make sure they were indoors. "Call that freedom?" said the little man.

He lowered his voice as two well groomed newcomers with shiny suitcases passed our table. "Police spies," he said. "The bastards are everywhere."

The following morning was bitterly cold. A rain shower ended with a crescendo of hailstones. Away from the city, across the valley, a blanket of snow and solid cloud pressed down on the mountain range. In that direction I headed with a guide by taxi to a Palestinian refugee camp miles out in the desert.

My guide, a well fed, well bred young man, called himself "a displaced person," whose propertied family had fled among the hundreds of thousands of Arabs in 1948. Now he worked in the Damascus office of Emile Bustani. Of the 80,000 refugees in Syria, a substantial number had jobs and homes, but thousands, in work or idle, were doomed to dwell like farm animals, huddled in barbed wire compounds of leaky tents and scrap-material huts. Without a permit we could not enter the camps, but as we stood at the wire to observe and ask questions, a dozen youngsters in ragged jerseys and threadbare knickers, or cotton shirts reaching down to bare feet, rushed forward with begging hands outstretched. Tiny bodies shivered in the keen air, teeth chattered. Behind the wire, in ones and twos or sullen knots, adults sat or stood motionless, gazing absently into empty, endless, windswept space. A handful were going through the motions of washing remnants of clothing in a

bucket, cleaning a few blackened pots or hanging out the old blankets and sacking which at night covered the aged and the young herded together on the earthen floors of tents.

These hungry, stateless people - many of whom sold their meagre United Nations rations to buy cheaper, less nutritious food and cigarettes - had suffered in this bleak, morale destroying wilderness for five years, sleeping perhaps eight to a tent, unless one died or a new baby was born. Not all the refugees I saw were inadequately clothed or obviously malnourished, but there was no denying their helpless, hopeless plight.

"Is nothing being done for these people?" I asked my guide.

He said the UN relief agency had offered better accommodation, but the refugees refused it. "You see, they don't want to settle in Syria; they want to go home. And the Syrian Government is against creating permanent homes for them. When they are ready, all Palestinians will be needed to re-occupy their own land."

His tone became near belligerent when he uttered his parting shot: "You have seen the camps and you can understand why we hate the Jews who stole our land. Every young man in Syria is waiting for the day when we shall fight them. We are not afraid to die in a just cause. And we know we shall win in the end!"

Beirut, my next port of call, rich in diversity, twixt green, snowcapped mountains and the sea, was no mere crossroads where east met west but a gathering centre from all directions. Opulence and squalor, expensive medicine and endemic disease, culture and learning clashing with ignorance and superstition, political murder and intrigue, all formed a pattern with commercial skills in a fascinating city, cosmopolitan and gently warm now that spring had come. It was Easter, a time for lavish celebration by Christians of orthodox and subsidiary sects who shared Beirut with Muslims and Druzes. Famed as a playground for affluent Arabs and Gulf oil workers on leave, it fell strangely silent at around 11 at night, when the numerous cinemas turned out.

It too had wretched refugee camps. One hundred thousand Palestinians were scattered in camps across Lebanon: hungry, bitter people who cursed the British and American Governments, the United Nations, the Jews. Conditions in the three camps on the

outskirts of Beirut - Burj al Barajneh, Mar Elias and Shatila - were disgusting. Tight, disorderly clusters of ragged white tents and makeshift one-room huts of canvas, sacking, tree branches and tin sheets were homes for thousands.

Sanitation and washing arrangements were woeful - queues formed at times to use the cess pits - and water brought in cans from outside was scarce. I was besieged by refugees anxious to talk of their plight and display specimens of their rations: a handful of lentils, "only fit for chickens to eat"; or a slice of hard soap, "to last a month." They spoke of a cut in the flour ration, no clothes for three years, of tents flooded in winter. They pointed out the blind and the lame, the mentally crippled, the old and frail, the eight orphaned sisters. A modicum of medical and educational service was provided, but too little. It was odd that a few families, by dint of dignity or habit, had scrubbed their tents clean and planted a few flowers and spent hours rummaging for scraps to feed a scrawny fowl or two.

But all wanted justice and the chance to go home. (Three decades later, in September 1982, some 2,600 Palestinians, many women and children, were slaughtered in Shatila and Sabra camp by Lebanese Christian Phalangists who, under the gaze of the Israeli Army, invaded the camps ostensibly to flush out PLO activists.)

I delayed my departure from Beirut on learning that Al Bakr was due there. I was anxious to talk to him about his recent political travels throughout the region. He had promised at an early meeting that, at the appropriate time, he would take me into his confidence and reveal all. Now was the time. He was busy when we met but he said I could join him that night at a meeting with Bahrainis who were studying at the American University. I was not sure whether he seriously wanted my company or was merely being polite, so I tactfully declined his invitation. I was hoping he would repeat the offer but he did not and I felt rather stupid. Now I would never discover what he was up to.

Next morning, I called at his hotel, the Savoy in the main square, to say goodbye. I was off to Aleppo, en route to Turkey. Abdul Rahman was in bed and he poked his head out of the covers when I entered his room. He looked dreadful and said he felt unwell. A bad cold I didn't doubt he had, but likely a hangover too.

I handed him a list of trenchant questions I had submitted to Belgrave with a covering note saying I hoped he would not think them impertinent, which they were. I asked Belgrave if he would agree that government in Bahrain could be described as feudal and invited him to say how the ruling family spent their time and their vast cut of the oil revenue, and who was paying for a new palace in Manama, and how was he getting on with instituting a register of births and deaths, etc.

Abdul Rahman scanned the list and was suitably impressed with my handiwork. Had Belgrave responded? No, I said, I hadn't expected him to though I would have been interested in his reaction. He asked if he could keep the list and I said it was his copy. We shook hands and exchanged good wishes, a little sadly. I left the room.

I arrived in England in time for the Queen's coronation after 64 days of interesting and adventurous travel. I had a letter from Bapco given to me on departure, dated March 8, which said: "On the assumption that you wish to continue your career with this Company, we shall ask you, upon your return here, to renew the Letter of Agreement..."

Awaiting me at home was a registered letter dated March 12 which referred to the March 8 letter and went on, "The question of your return for further service with this Company has been given further consideration by the Management. It is the decision that it would be in the best interests of yourself and the Company that you should not return for further service with our organization at Bahrain... We shall now be unable further to utilize your services." Berdine had signed it.

The language struck me as quaint and I wondered if someone other than the management had decided to designate me *persona non grata*. I wrote back: "How do you determine my interests?"

I also asked Berdine to destroy or return my fingerprints. He sent these to me but ignored the question of severance.

14. Assassination plot

THE CORONATION in June had everyone agog. In Awali, the new editor of the *Islander*, one Mike Sumner, reported "all inhibitions were forgotten" at the Coronation Eve Ball at the club. "At midnight, hundreds of glasses were raised to drink the Health of Her Majesty, and both the National Anthem and Land of Hope and Glory were sung with exceptional fervour."

Shaikh Sulman and his son Mohammed came to London for the crowning and rode in state among the worldwide assemblage of monarchs, presidents and potentates. After acquainting himself briefly with life and leisure in stately homes and the workings of institutes of learning and industry, His Highness returned to a rapturous homecoming. Crowds lined flag festooned streets and days and nights were given over to feasting and dancing and merrymaking. Such scenes of unparalleled joy, whether spontaneous or inspired, must have had a reason and it was said that people remembered when Shaikh Abdulla came home from England in 1919, imagination fired in the cause of education. Now in 1953, the people supposed or hoped that Sulman was returning to announce a far reaching programme of reforms. They were mistaken.

Sir Rupert Hay went home with his family at this time and his replacement, Bernard Burrows, was the first resident appointed directly by the Foreign Office in London.

Yet another demonstration of joy, tinged with sadness, marked the departure later in the year of Russell Brown, called by head office to join the Fifth Avenue hierarchy. As general manager he had been instrumental in carrying out New York's policy changes that had particularly benefited the rupee payroll. Arabs and Indians were fulsome in their tributes at feasts and presentations to honour a "tolerant and kind" father figure.

In uncharacteristic Churchillian tones, Brown told Bahraini workers: "You are taking an increasingly active and responsible part

in the operation of our company here. Never in the history of the world has opportunity knocked more loudly at the door. Your company is searching for the talented, the man who wants to learn, the man willing to accept both responsibility and obligations."

Abdul Rahman wrote me a couple of not very informative letters. In one he reported that his society had met a group of British Conservative MPs on a visit to Bahrain. Among them was "one Mr Wakefield, an ex-HM political agent during wartime. This gentleman is long known to us for his fanaticism and imperialism and we could see no change in his attitude even now. We understand this man has submitted a most unreasonable report against us to HM Government (of course, his own construction).

"During the interview we had with him, he also spoke many things against the Labour Party in the UK and even told us that they would be driven out from the British dominions and colonies." Such men did no service to their own country, Al Bakr concluded. An odd paragraph or two in the British press indicated that odd events were persisting in Bahrain. When the Government decreed that all motorists must take out third party insurance, the taxi drivers went on strike. To forestall strike breakers, roads were strewn with nails and tintacks. Al Bakr's group, now styled the Committee of National Union, proposed a scheme, a Compensation Co-operative, that would keep out British insurance companies and all sides agreed to it. A fund known as 'sanduq' (the chest) operated from January 1955.

The committee became overtly political, the first real political party in the Gulf, in Belgrave's eyes. He even sympathised with some of its aspirations but, typically, if he could accept the message he rejected the messenger. He ruled out an elected parliament, arguing that democracy was the product of centuries and in Bahrain education was only in its infancy. He became a target as the committee sought to isolate him from the ruler. The adviser, unnerved, complained about a telephoned threat to his life, hate mail and press hostility.

Al Bakr became an international figure. He made trips to Cairo to meet Egyptian leaders and from there made radio broadcasts denouncing British imperialism and demanding Belgrave's

dismissal. In 1955, according to Belgrave's memoirs, Al Bakr and Abdul Aziz Shemlan were making clandestine visits to the residency and winning support from young men on whose advice London sought to reverse policies endorsed by the ruler. Belgrave noted, "The residency was up to the neck in the political quagmire."

Sir Bernard Burrows, resident at the time, confirmed in his book, *Footnotes in the Sand*, that meetings took place. The ruler and the adviser would not talk to the national committee, so the residency acted as go-between. The British Government urged the ruler to meet some of the committee's demands while intimating that it would continue to support him whatever course he took.

One committee objective which won British approval was elected councils to run health and education services. The ruler countered with half elected, half nominated bodies, chaired by a Khalifa, on the lines of the municipal councils. Members were elected but they refused to take their seats. No matter, Belgrave observed, elected and appointed were uneducated and of no standing.

Burrows quoted a caustic comment from a British official that after 30 years of Belgrave's "benevolent despotism," it was time for him to go.

In March 1956, the British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, visited Bahrain and his car was stoned after leaving the airport. The ruler decided to set up an administrative council of his relatives to govern the country, under the presidency of Abdulla, now 75, and planned to announce that Belgrave would be leaving in January 1957.

Al Bakr went to Cairo to meet Colonel Nasser and returned to Bahrain in September with a plan for a new political campaign, but this was shelved when the Suez crisis arose and Arabs everywhere demonstrated for withdrawal of British, French and Israeli invasion forces from the Canal.

At the beginning of November, the committee called a strike and rally, which Al Bakr promised would be orderly, but schoolboys set about disruption. In expectation of disorder, British troops had been stationed at the airport and naval base and they moved British residents to Awali and Jufair when British homes and businesses in Manama were burned or looted by mobs. After four days of troubles,

the shaikh, with British Government approval, rounded up the committee leaders. Al Bakr, Shemlan, Ali Alewat and Ibrahim bin Musa were arrested; a fifth, Ibrahim Fakhro, was already in custody. A number of their supporters fled to Qatar, Kuwait and Lebanon. The five were accused of planning to assassinate Shaikh Sulman, members of his family and Sir Charles Belgrave and of organising a violent strike.

The police, who prosecuted, predicted disturbances if the prisoners were conveyed to Manama for trial, so a special court was set up in a small room at Budeya. The ruler appointed as judges his uncle Abdulla and brothers Daij and Ali. After a two-day trial, the defendants, who refused to accept the tribunal's jurisdiction, were found guilty. Ibrahim Musa and Ibrahim Fakhro were sentenced to ten years on nearby Jidda Island.

The other three were ordered to serve 14 years far away. Bombay, traditional place of exile, being no longer available, the British, with a dramatic flourish, sent a frigate at Christmastime to transport the prisoners to St Helena in the South Atlantic, the lonely island where Napoleon ended his days.

Questions were raised. The London Daily Herald under the headline "What's going on in the isle of an oil dictatorship?" asked if Britain was turning Bahrain from a Protectorate into a Crown Colony because an Order in Council had been made to legalise deportation of the three prisoners "who rebelled against Bahrain's despotic ruler." The Foreign Office denied any change in the state's independent status.

Belgrave's reaction to the transportation was Good Riddance! The committee leaders had only themselves to blame for their plight. His unflattering description of them and their followers was surely an insight into his own character. They were all rascals, in his view. Al Bakr was a political refugee from Qatar, from a shady merchant family, fat, unhealthy, unreliable and excitable, a failed businessman who lived from hand to mouth, though a most persuasive speaker. Shemlan was an embittered bank official and accomplished tub thumper, half caste son of a man of slave origin ("not that I have any prejudice against negroes") who had been jailed for sedition by an earlier ruler. Number three in the committee hierarchy, Ali

Alewat, was a small shopkeeper with little education. The other five committee members were "stooges." A second tier numbered 100 young clerks, teachers and others, but these deserted when their leaders were arrested, said Belgrave.

Now that the would be assassins and public enemies were safely out of the way, the adviser, the ruler, the merchants and the mass of the people could breathe a sigh of relief, confident that everybody would go back to work and strife would be no more. And Belgrave could keep his job.

The case of the St Helena Three became a cause celebre, exciting the concern of parliament and lawyers in London, and a left wing Labour MP, Eric Heffer, kept a watching brief. After four years, the ruler decided he wanted them returned to Bahrain and his request to the UK Conservative Government produced a favourable response from Edward Heath, then Lord Privy Seal.

Labour members immediately forced a debate in the House of Commons and one, John Stonehouse, said: "If they are returned they will probably have their heads chopped off." He accused the Government of behaving dishonourably throughout the case and claimed the men were arrested because of alleged association with protests against the Conservative Government's Suez operation.

Mr Reginald Paget argued that extradition was unwarrantable while Habeas Corpus proceedings were pending. He said the prisoners belonged to a revolutionary group whose aim was to get members of a public sanitation committee elected and not nominated. Their trial came four days after the ruler had written to the Queen asking for their accommodation on St Helena. Mr Paget added: "There is nothing in the law that compels our Government to make themselves assistant executioners in this sort of justice."

Mr Heath replied that the men's offences included an attempt to assassinate the ruler and overthrow the Government. It was the ruler's request that they be sent to St Helena and while it was true he made this before the trial, it was conditional on a conviction.

Labour MPs still insisted that the conviction had been a foregone conclusion and argued there was no obligation to send the men back. Mr Heath answered that an agreement with the ruler carried

such an obligation. The Foreign Secretary had urged that the sentences should be commuted to exile, but the ruler rejected this.

According to Mr Heath, the British Government was not prepared to grant the men political asylum. They would be returned to Bahrain not for extra punishment or for political reasons but because the Government took it to be the feeling of MPs that they should not be kept on St Helena. He indicated he would try to delay their return until legal aspects had been clarified.

The London Observer in an editorial comment on 25 December 1960 said: "The Ruler of Bahrain's request for the return to his custody of the three Arab prisoners on St Helena should be firmly denied. The possible embarrassment of having to refuse the request stems from the deplorable over-eagerness of the British Government in 1956 to collaborate in removing the shaikh's political opponents from the Persian Gulf.

"The manifest injustice of these proceedings - the three Arabs were tried in the Shaikh's own court - calls for the immediate release of the prisoners. The Colonial Prisoners Removal Act does not require them to be returned to Bahrain; they should be granted a Queen's Pardon."

As parliamentary and press criticism grew, Shaikh Sulman invited Mr Heath and George Brown, deputy leader of the Labour Party, to Bahrain. They visited Jidda, where the St Helena men would presumably resume their sentences, and saw the other two prisoners. Brown considered they were living in better conditions than many free people he had seen in the Middle East. He told a London Times correspondent: "I assured the ruler I will do all I can to make clear the conditions I saw at Jidda. I left him with a clear understanding that people in Britain hope he will be able to exercise clemency in the cases of his political prisoners, but it would be quite wrong for me to interfere in the way he runs things."

Heath said the two prisoners told him they had no major complaints. This disproved statements about the way prisoners were being treated and the way "other prisoners would be treated."

In the event, the St Helena trio were not returned to Bahrain but freed in 1961. Abdul Rahman Al Bakr settled in Beirut.

Charles Belgrave retired to England in 1959. Shaikh Sulman, ruler since 1942, died in 1961. His eldest son Isa succeeded him.

Josephson, after a stint as refinery manager in the Philippines, returned to Bahrain as Bapco vice-president and general manager and it was his misfortune to run into labour trouble in 1965. He was a bit out of his depth, it was said. Brown would have handled things better. Be that as it may, Josephson was not the author of a harsh decision taken in New York to halve the Bahrain workforce. In a way, Jo-Jo was the fall guy. Once before, in 1945, New York had misread the portents and, fearing a postwar oil slump while rising Texas production depressed prices, made plans for a partial or total shutdown in Bahrain. In fact, demand soared. It became the task for Josephson and Berdine in 1948 to initiate training and educational schemes that were to lead, after my time, to apprenticeships for youths, secretarial training for Arab young women and management posts for Bahrainis.

Now, two decades on, New York again feared a slump and Josephson was ordered to decimate the ranks of skilled Europeans, Indians and Bahrainis. The ruler summoned the general manager and demanded reversal of the order, or at least reinstatement of sacked Bahrainis, but it was too late to stop three weeks of strikes, rioting in Manama and arson on Bapco premises.

Throughout the 1960s, the pace of change quickened in the Gulf. Britain, which had been systematically decolonising after freeing India, announced its decision to recall military establishments and abandon treaty commitments East of Suez by 1971. Kuwait in fact gained independence in 1961, under threat of invasion by Iraq to which it paid a ransom.

New oil finds meant that shaikhdoms in the lower Gulf, notably Dubai and Abu Dhabi, suddenly became immersed in spectacular wealth; tiny populations living in primitive conditions possessed a valuable natural resource but weak political and social institutions.

Bahrain, sophisticated by comparison, was now likely to fall behind its neighbours. A glance at the oil league table was enough, with output in 1969: Saudi Arabia 148 million tons, Kuwait 129m, Iraq 75m, Abu Dhabi 29m, Qatar 17m and Bahrain less than four

million tons. While Bahrain's state revenue was around £10m (three-quarters from oil), Kuwait's was touching a billion pounds.

The Government had long recognised that Bahrain must diversify outside oil if it was to remain prosperous when either energy came from a different source or the oil dried up. Young Belgrave had floated some fanciful ideas in the early 1950s, such as a cottage industry making and exporting mother of pearl buttons. A way must be found to utilise the waste gas that was burned after separation from crude oil, he declared.

A way was found after the discovery of a vast field of natural gas: using it to fuel a large aluminium smelter. In 1969, at the time a new landmark was completed - a Cable and Wireless earth satellite station - an international consortium, with a Government stake, agreed to spend £24m on building the smelter.

Mindful of the need to modernise and to maintain stability after the British pulled out, the Trucial Coast shikhdoms with Qatar and Bahrain agreed on the formation of a federation to provide for a common approach to defence, land ownership, citizenship, labour laws, social affairs and welfare. Bahrain entered it briefly, but before then Iran warned Bahrain not to do so because it still, after centuries, laid claim to sovereignty over Bahrain.

Confrontation between Britain and Iran over the issue was resolved when both agreed to ask the United Nations Security Council to find a peaceful solution. The UN secretary-general, U Thant, sent Winspeare Guicciardi, an Italian, to Bahrain as his representative to sound out popular feeling. His verdict was: "The Bahrainis I met were virtually unanimous in wanting a fully independent state. The great majority added that this should be an Arab state."

On 12 May 1970, the security council met and unanimously declared Bahrain an independent state. The Iranian delegate said his Government had been ready to shoulder the burden of re-uniting with Bahrain, but it now deferred to the wishes of the inhabitants. The council's French president observed that sounding out public opinion could not have the value of a democratic consultation but was justified in this case.

Anticipating independence, which he formally declared in 1971, Shaikh Isa issued a decree creating a Council of State at the

beginning of 1970 and appointing Bahrainis over Britons as heads of departments. Five Khalifa shaikhs were given portfolios: the ruler's brother Khalifa as president, his son Hamed (Defence) and others foreign affairs, justice and municipal and rural affairs. The health minister, Dr Ali Fakhroo, was from the merchant dynasty that provided an early and allegedly corrupt education leader, the head of the fire disaster committee and one of the assassination gang.

Of the old guard, one remained: Ahmed Umran in charge of education. The first of the university scholarship students to get a degree, Yusuf Shirawi, was given the development and technical services department to run.

The ruler, now known as the Amir, also called for national unity and promised a constitution and popular participation in government. The constitution provided for elections to a national assembly at the end of 1973 and 85 per cent of the male electorate turned out to choose 30 members. A strong element of the mercantile elite among the candidates (parties were illegal) expected to win a large majority voice, but over a third of the seats went to recognisable left wingers and a small revolutionary Islamic group.

Democracy was but a fleeting flirtation. The Amir dissolved the assembly in August 1975 after the prime minister resigned and the Khalifa family regained absolute authority. Assembly members were blamed for personal feuding and wasting time debating a wide range of issues from oil nationalisation to total seclusion of women. Shaikh Isa's patience ran out when bills accumulated and a draft security law to sanction detention without trial was held up. Public reaction to the closing of parliament appeared as muted hostility that soon evaporated. People were more concerned with jobs and working conditions than with ideological wrangling.

The 1970s were marked by crazy spiralling of world oil prices. A barrel of crude oil costing less than two US dollars at the start of the decade fetched over 30 dollars at the end. War and skilful, or ruthless, manipulation of the market by the mainly Arab members of OPEC, the petroleum exporting countries, contributed to the rise.

Bahrain naturally benefited. Other factors in one year, 1974, brought a spectacular gush of income. A new offshore oil field came

into production and the Government acquired a 60 per cent stake in Bapco's oilfield production and raised tax on the company's operations to 85 per cent. In that single year, Government oil receipts increased eightfold. By 1977, state revenue had jumped to around £335m a year, over two-thirds from oil, but expenditure was even higher. To stay on an even keel, the Government looked to aid from wealthier Arab neighbours and income from offshore banks which, by invitation, had arrived to handle vast quantities of Gulf petrodollars.

Meanwhile, political discontent simmered, inspired it was said by revolution in Iran. In 1981, 25 years after the St Helena affair, a plot for another coup was uncovered. Weapons were found and a large number of shia Muslims appeared before military courts, which sentenced more than 50 to jail terms of up to 25 years.

Reports circulated from time to time by Amnesty International claimed that members of banned Islamic groups, such as Hizbollah (Party of God) and the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, were jailed without trial on the basis of confessions. The Bahraini authorities denied allegations of torture.

15 Forty years on

IN THE summer of 1988, I was in a British United Nations Association group in New York to study the UN. On a momentous day, we briefly met the secretary-general, Javier Perez de Cuellar, in his 38th floor office. It was the day he received the envoys of Iran and Iraq to signal the end of their long and costly war. Two other major events were in the offing - independence for Namibia and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan - and a spirit akin to euphoria gripped UN headquarters.

Two years later, Iraqi forces invaded and occupied Kuwait, to the accompaniment of bloodshed and destruction and the prospect of total war. It seemed inconceivable that a government which had so recently concluded one war could now contemplate another bloodbath, yet in happened in Baghdad.

Before and during the Gulf War of 1991 - 'Desert Storm' - I demonstrated with anti-war groups who believed that among other things the United States had hijacked the United Nations to satisfy what appeared to be a lust for hostilities.

If blundering and miscalculation provided a preface, this latest chapter in 20th century scientific horror was carefully contrived and orchestrated. Lies, distortion and manipulation of the mass media all had a role. My mind returned to Baghdad in 1953 and its raw, ragged soldiery. Now, we were told, it was the fourth largest army in the world, made up of crack fighting men and 'elite Republican Guards,' and bristling with up to date armaments and technology.

Yet a glance at the map or reference book demonstrated the significance of Iraq, in size and population and economic capability, compared with the so-called Allied nations, major and middling powers. Even denied the military support of Germany and Japan, who stood derided for sticking to their no-war constitutions, the Allies were scarcely David to an Iraqi Goliath, but the idea was systematically nurtured. Nothing in the Gulf War exonerated the

Iraqi president, Saddam Hussain, from blame. But the suggestion that the psychopaths were all on one side deserved critical examination.

Bahrain, of course, figured prominently in the war, not as a combatant itself, but as a haven for Allied warships and a launch pad for many of the aircraft which played so crucial and devastating a part. For some fighting men, it offered creature comforts unavailable in other sectors.

News from the war zone, Baghdad, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, flashed constantly by TV, stirred memories and crystallised an idea that had nagged me for some years, to make a sentimental journey back to Bahrain. Forty years on: there was a ring about it. I resolved to travel when the dust of war had settled and the worst of the torrid weather was past, accompanied by memorabilia, old newspapers, Bahrain Islanders, documents and hundreds of photos, a slice of history for transfer from my spare-bedroom archives to Bapco and Bahrain Government vaults.

I bought an air ticket and sent a brief outline of my mission to the Ministry of Information in Manama with an expressed hope that I might find modest accommodation available. No feedback came. I set off in early November 1991.

Normally, I contrive to arrive at an unfamiliar destination at about eight in the morning. It puts you first in the queue at the tourist bureau to book a bed and breakfast lodging, usually the one that belongs to a friend of the booking clerk and therefore reliable. But it was well after midnight when the KLM jumbo jet touched down at Muharraq. After a sleepless night at Heathrow and most of the day in the air or mooching around the airport at Amsterdam, then stopping at Dubai before retracing the path to Bahrain, I alighted tired, hot and far from buoyant.

It could have been any international airport. They all look the same. Step from the aircraft cabin straight into a portable tunnel that is long and winding, with pastel hued walls and plain carpeting, leading to the spacious arrival hall with its bright strip lighting and baggage carousel and passport desks and customs benches. Muharraq never used to be like that; just a control tower and a couple of outhouses, half a dozen passengers and crew on an

infrequent night arrival and "The last one out, switch off the lights!"

And now, who were all these men dotted about the place in olive green uniforms, some with pens and date stamps and mobile phones, but more armed with pistols and batons?

I swapped some pounds for dinars at the exchange window and filled in a form. "Where are you staying?" asked an immigration official, observing I had left one line blank. "I don't know."

"What hotel are you going to?"

"I haven't got one," I said. It looked as though a diplomatic incident might ensue. "Put down British Embassy," I suggested. The man waved me through.

Encumbered by luggage, I staggered into another hall, the last one before the exit. Travel agents' booths lined one wall, but all abandoned for the night. A prominent sign on one, KANOO, proved I was in the right place but I suddenly realised I was alone. All the other passengers had melted away. No hanging around for them, they had somewhere to go. I had not. I had ignored the advice of various authorities: arrange everything in advance, down to the last detail, above all a hotel.

As a seasoned traveller, I did not need such advice. Besides - I suppose it was ridiculous really - I half expected that a man from the Ministry would be there to greet me, a long lost son of Bahrain. Lost was the operative word. I felt lost, and not a soul around that I could turn to. I sank dejectedly on to a hard plastic chair.

"You want taxi?" A gnarled little man in a dirty white nightshirt appeared in the doorway. He answered his own question as he made to seize my heaviest case. "What hotel?"

My response I had rehearsed, last used in Beirut those many years ago. "Fundaq saghiir, wa rakhiis wa nadhiif." A small hotel, cheap and clean!

He rubbed his chin. Might be difficult at this hour. He was old, like his cab, but wiry and chirpy. He ordered me to climb in.

The guide book implied that taxi drivers were rogues, doubly so after midnight, who failed to display the regulation tariff and ripped off passengers in the absence of a pre-negotiated fare. My driver no doubt felt handsomely rewarded by the sum he took from me, but I

was in no mood for haggling and he did find me a room in Manama after the Middle East Hotel was pronounced full up.

To identify the hotel that accommodated me for ten days might do an injustice because repair and rehabilitation work then about to start could well have earned it a star in the guide book. It had a famous name.

Bristol Hotel, or Hotel Bristol, is almost an English trademark. Where earlier generations of merchants trod or gentry doing The Grand Tour sojourned, The Bristol sprang up alongside Hotel George IV, Grand Hotel and the like. A fine specimen, though reduced to Bed and Breakfast for backpackers, the Bristol in Avignon's main street impressed with its ornamented chambers, genuinely en suite and boasting bathrooms which, if neither baroque nor neo-Gothic, were magnificent. In Manama's main artery, Shaikh Isa Avenue, the bathroom in the Bristol was unspectacular, though a telephone was thoughtfully installed in a position in the lavatory where one could communicate with the outside world while enthroned. This Bristol was not shipshape. It was aging and decrepit, though that might have counted as character. But, wearily creeping into my first floor room at 2 am, I had other things on my mind. Simple arithmetic suggested that if a spartan room cost £28 a day, without meals, and a taxi around £3 a mile, stretching the £1,200 I had in my wallet over 34 days could be achieved only by rigorously economising on food.

I made black coffee with my portable boiler, an essential travelling companion, and toyed with the air cooling unit to find an optimum level where noise and heat reduction were together tolerable. Perhaps I slept for an hour before sunrise and street traffic roused me.

Inspection in the light of day revealed that the hotel had seen better times, notwithstanding a brochure which illustrated its various features: one homely steak restaurant enhanced by Our Folk Singer; a pizza parlour; another restaurant which offered "live entertainment every night from our exciting Filippino Band"; yet another restaurant with an Arabic atmosphere and live music; and the private Londoners' Bar for registered liquor addicts from The Old Country. It was an attraction to mature Arabs and young

American sailors who crowded the tiny vestibule. The brochure boasted that the "spacious rooms" were furnished with such essentials as private bathroom, colour TV with in house movies, radio, etc. not to mention the fridge, or mini bar, replete with spirit miniatures...and a half bottle of Scotch at £15. A homely message from the British general manager trilled, "We try to offer an alternative to all the unnecessary and expensive frills of a five star hotel...a home away from home."

The attempt to distance it from a plush abode certainly succeeded, though I couldn't see where home came in. Admittedly, the low double bed was comfortable, but the carpeting was heavily patterned by the ground in grime brought in from unwashed streets. The TV did not work. The radio, cunningly concealed in a drawer, consisted of a loudspeaker and two short wires which went nowhere and produced no sound. Unless used with utmost caution, the shower flooded the bathroom.

The hotel fronted a decaying section of the avenue, yet traffic and commerce kept it lively. It backed on to an extensive Muslim cemetery, old and unkempt, full of crudely inscribed headstones which leaned drunkenly.

I breakfasted on a piece of chocolate, a tomato and black coffee and prepared, somewhat apprehensively, to embark on the campaign to dispose of my memorabilia, to renew old acquaintances and, by view and interview, to pick up the threads. I needed to get my bearings, visit the British Embassy, place the story of my presence in the local press, and find Amer.

Amer was still around, I learned from the Bahrain Embassy's cultural attaché in London, Hasan Monfaradi, who started working life as a Bapco welding apprentice in 1956. He felt pretty sure that Amer was now a hotel owner. That would be perfect, if he could fix me up with a modest room at a reasonable price. There was no Amer in the phone book.

The Bristol brochure promised friendly assistance and advice so I asked the young Filipina in reception where the bus stop was and she said, "I don't know. I'm new here. I only started this morning." "I don't know" was a phrase I was to hear again and again. Varied features and changing moods made Shaikh Isa Avenue, named after

the Amir and his great-grandfather, the most interesting street in Manama. It appeared with some realignment to be Belgrave Road of old. Trust Belgrave to pick the best road to bear his name. And trust the Khalifas to wipe him off the map!

It was not the only change in that hot, sunny thoroughfare. Traffic now drove on the right. And women, freed from purdah, though still shrouded in black, sat confidently, even recklessly, at the wheel, determined to suffer no intimidation as they raced their Mercedes round roundabouts or filtered at speed, bumper to bumper, from slip roads. Taxi drivers were not alone in halting a flood of vehicles in a main thoroughfare to make a U-turn. Traffic was frightening, incessant for most of the day and much of the night. Where on this tiny island was everybody going to or escaping from? If here and there faint stripes of a pedestrian crossing were visible, they counted for nothing. No motorist ever stopped for a pedestrian and it was not unusual to wait several minutes to cross a road.

Across the street from the Bristol was the central public library and in the next side street a large yard occupied by education department buildings. One double storey building was falling down, slowly and none too gracefully. In the yard, a huge globe, crudely painted with the continents and badly weathered on a tall stand must have been long abandoned. Surely this building was a familiar landmark. Wretched, it look vaguely like the secondary schoolboys' hostel that was opened in grand style in 1952 and defined as one of the Gulf's finest jewels, academically and architecturally.

I wandered about seeking memories and lost the direction of the embassy. Seeing a group of police in a guard post, I asked if they knew the British Embassy. "Take a taxi," said one. The others repeated it.

"I don't want a taxi," I said. "Do you know the direction?" One pointed up the street. "That way," he said, uncertainly.

After a hundred yards or so, I spotted an Englishman stowing shopping in his car. "I'm looking for the British Embassy. D'you know the direction?"

He turned his head this way and that and confessed ignorance. "I think it might be that way," he said, pointing towards the police post. I ignored his instruction and turned a corner. There, larger

than life, was the sprawling embassy compound. No distance at all. "Take a taxi" seemed to be the automatic response when I stopped people in the street, even for a few hundred yards.

Before I left England, a man familiar with modern Bahrain told me, "You'll need a car to get about." I replied, "I don't drive." "Oh dear," he said, ominously. On this first day, I was lucky to meet an Awali wife employed at the embassy. She drove me to Awali to meet Bapco officials and I returned to Manama by the company's afterwork bus.

Spending cautiously until I could work out a sensible budget, I ate frugally on this first day and felt less than replete when I set out for a late evening stroll. Given faith, I would have known that the Lord would provide.

Behind the Bristol Hotel, on the far side of the graveyard, the map showed St Christopher's, incomplete when I left before. Following a deserted, unlit road, long and winding, I would have missed the church, tucked away in a yard, but the resounding din of music and jollification attracted my attention.

Investigating what I assumed was a disco hall, I was surprised to find the church, doors open wide, packed with perspiring figures, nearly 200, adults and children, arms raised and shouting in tongues, clapping their hands and stamping feet in time to a guitar-twanging, cymbal clashing quartet. To the boisterous rhythm, the swaying, swinging congregation ecstatically chorused, "I'm gonna sing Hallelujah again and again!" This was the grand finale, sung again and again.

I arrived just in time to help an Englishman, Ron, a sort of elder, and Indians to carry chairs from the church into a hall, a small voluntary labour which earned me a large supper of curried meat and rice, a sickly tapioca sweet and a fizzy drink.

The good folk were charismatics of The Church of Philadelphia, in the main from Asia and the Pacific, including a New Zealander in the meat trade and a teenage refugee from Cambodia. They were celebrating their sixth anniversary in a borrowed church with two hours of worship and singing before supper. Many, both men and women, appeared to be professional people, smartly groomed, the men with mobile phones clipped to their shirts. Several handed me

visiting cards, with their phone numbers, and suggested that if I kept in touch they might find me an inexpensive room in the sect's Manama hostel.

In my hotel, when the heavy meal had settled, I lay on my bed, fatigued by the day's exertions and contemplating sleep I desperately needed. Sleep eventually took over but ere long was shattered. At around three, a commotion under my first floor window woke me. The hotel's disco must have just turned out and a gang of men, number unknown for I could see only the fringes of them, gathered on the pavement to dance and sing some anthem or hit of the week, surely Arabic from the incessant repetition of words and phrases.

Fifteen minutes passed before the tumult subsided, replaced by the slamming of car doors and revving of engines. The discordant voices of a splinter group trailed off along Shaikh Isa Avenue. In these circumstances, only a cup of tea could bring relief and after brewing up I went back to bed.

A few minutes later, a slanging match started across the silent street. Two of the revellers stood on the corner arguing with a taxi driver. He kept pointing to his offside door, waving his arms and shouting. They shouted back. After what seemed an age the driver gave up and sped away.

Now could I get to sleep? Barely had I become recumbent again than "Allah akbar!" rent the stillness. A faint tinge in the sky and the muezzin's call to the first prayer of the day heralded dawn.

The new gleaming white mosque at Godaybia, bathed in floodlight and clearly visible from my room a mile distant, was the source of an electronic, amplified disturbance designed to wake not merely the capital city but those long entombed behind the Bristol. I made another cup of tea. I sensed a nervous tremor, compounded of anger, irritation, frustration, lack of sleep, the inability to sleep, the fear that sleep would never come and I would turn into a zombie. How many, or few, hours all told had I slept these past three days and nights, four hours, maybe five? I lay down again. Whether I dozed off, I could not tell. Soon all was bustle outside, cars, buses and workmen's lorries.

I had arranged an afternoon interview with the English language tabloid Gulf Daily News and took myself off in the morning to the

Chamber of Commerce, nerve centre of the merchant class who in times past always kept a finger on Manama's pulse. If Amer was in business, the chamber would know. I breezed into the offices, identified myself and was instantly ushered into the public relations officer's room to find a youngish man, Abdul Hadi Al Marhoon, with advanced myopia and a singularly obliging manner. He was interested in history and thrilled when I gave him a copy of the chamber's original bilingual prospectus which set out the aims, objects and regulations for members. As a quid pro quo, he gathered up a heavy parcel of government and chamber publications for me.

The PRO knew of no Amer, certainly no hotel keeper of that name. He made a series of exploratory phone calls but drew a blank. Who else did I know? Well, the man who had introduced me to the chamber was Abdul Rahman Al Bakr, long since dead.

"You knew him?" said the PRO, astonished. "He wrote a book. You cannot buy it in Bahrain... Who else?"

"The Wazzans, the Kanoos, Hasan Al Jishy."

"You knew Hasan Jishy?"

"I certainly did," I replied. "He was head of West Manama primary school and, er" - I searched for a word - "a socialist." The PRO threw up his hands in mock horror. He grinned. "Jishy, socialist! Not now, not now."

"He's alive still?" I said.

"Yes, of course. He is a public relations consultant."

"He's what?" It was my turn to be surprised. He should have retired by now. Education to PR seemed an odd move. It appeared that Jishy had been in the short lived, ill fated national assembly. He had moved from the left to the right, establishment sympathies more pronounced since a relative, a brother or someone, had been given a government post.

I was intrigued. I must meet Jishy. He had been so helpful before, always ready to answer my questions. And now, in these intervening years, so much had happened, the political upheavals, the strikes and so on. He must have been close to the heart of things, so he would have much to tell and I much to learn. Surely we could talk long into the night...

The chamber man offered to get him on the phone for me. He tried three or four numbers but could not locate Jishy. He wrote down his home number to call after work.

Twice I phoned Jishy and the maid said he had not come home yet. The third time, he came to the phone.

"Hello, I'm Mapp. I'm in Manama. I worked in Awali forty years ago, on the Bahrain Islander. Do you remember me?"

"No, I don't know you. What is your name? Spell it."

I repeated my name, spelt it precisely and mentioned my visits to his old school. He said slowly, "I don't remember you. I don't know who you are."

His voice sounded strange. Not hostile, not agitated, yet not welcoming. I summoned up a few past events. He said, "Your memory is better than mine." He insisted he did not know me, then paused before adding, "What do you want of me?"

I said I hoped we could meet and talk over old times.

"Not possible," he said. "The past is finished. I am not in politics now." I hadn't mentioned politics, and I suspected he remembered me. Indeed, he continued, "I remember you now."

I said, "Can I come and see you?"

"No," he said firmly. "Read Abdul Rahman's book. It's all in there. Go and see his son, Dr Al Bakr."

"But I understand he lives in Qatar."

"That's right," Jishy replied. "I can't talk to you now. My sister is ill. It is difficult."

I was tempted to tell him that I had left my wife in England sitting by her mother's bedside watching life ebbing away, but such an admission would have done my credit no good.

Instead I said, "You won't see me then?"

"No, I'm sorry...I wish you a long life."

"I wish you the same," I said sorrowfully.

I put the phone down, feeling crushed. Jishy was my friend, I had believed. Now he was shunning me. Why? I had a feeling he knew who I was all the time, that someone had tipped him off about my presence, that his denial was a sham. I couldn't see the point of it though. There was so much he could tell me, purely as a matter of history even. But he refused to meet me.

Well, other people said when I mentioned it, perhaps he wasn't the dedicated rebel I imagined him to be. He was in the crowd picked up for the assassination plot who were told their health would improve if they went abroad for a while. Jishy was one who chose exile in Kuwait where jobs were found for them. He came home in due course and when the national assembly met in 1973 he was given the exalted position of Speaker.

I wondered - perhaps he felt shame, he living comfortably in Kuwait while the others were jailed on St Helena and Jidda. Or was he afraid - a shade younger than I - of two old men being seen talking together? It was possible he had through boredom or disenchantment quit politics; or felt himself above the battle, like those ex-Speakers at Westminster who sacrifice erstwhile passionate ideals and cherished causes for a crossbench seat in the House of Lords. But what was the real reason? I did not know the answer. I felt not anger but hurt.

Dead men tell no tales, they say. But here the living were the tongue tied ones. I turned to an unimpeachable source, my first opportunity to read Belgrave's book, *Personal Column*, written in 1960 and out of print. It had long disappeared from the shelves of the lending libraries in Manama and Awali but a few people had their own copy of a strange and disappointing tale. An autobiography is one man's story but it does not have to confine itself to one individual. This one largely did. Here was a heroic presence, physically big and strong, intellectually superior, good family, son of a barrister, the young man destined for the church, Oxford, colonial administrator, knight, come among the backward natives, bringing civilisation, enlightenment, progress. At the end, one was left to ask, was he more than a giant among pygmies?

Personal Column, a reference to *The Times'* column which advertised his job in Bahrain, was not, I suspect, the story Belgrave intended to write. But life turned sour towards the end and he had to vent his disenchantment and bitterness. Eight years earlier the American journalist had written: "Neither the problems nor the critics upset Belgrave. He knows he has the support of 99.9 per cent of Bahrain's residents, native and foreign." Any substance in that

questionable assertion had long since evaporated. Plotters and unscrupulous men of little consequence had undermined his authority. He should have quit Bahrain in 1957 but stayed till retirement was due. He departed then only reluctantly on discovering he was ill and would need to enter hospital in England. If his problem was physical it might have been aggravated by an element of paranoia. After 33 years of devoted service to Bahrain, he had discovered that the people were ungrateful, unsentimental, cynical and materialistic. He had created many achievements and opportunities and brought benefits to people who did not appreciate them, he believed.

He argued on one hand that Bahrain was not ready for democratic government. At this stage it would only lead to chaos and confusion. On the other hand, he noted, "I witnessed the emergence of political consciousness among the people and the growing pains of democracy."

He scorned welfare statism and said his friends laughed when he introduced wartime food rationing and price control: "Me, a staunch Tory, operating a scheme which was definitely Socialistic." However, he and the ruler agreed that only the state could run a proper health service. And health came before education. Education in the region, even at Beirut University level, failed to instil the esprit de corps, physical fitness and discipline that characterised English public schools. A little learning made Bahrainis unfit for labouring and literacy did not make for happiness, he concluded.

After his outpouring of bile in a work sadly short of penetration and illumination, Belgrave wrote this final paragraph: "The first thing that anyone sees on entering our house is a picture of the Shaikh. Never will Marjorie and I forget the unfailing kindness, the consideration and the generosity of my friend and master, Shaikh Sulman, and his father before him."

My master! Was Belgrave serious, a man of his stature reduced to humble slave? My master! - it was like something out of The Arabian Nights. Perhaps it was Belgrave's idea of signing off with a flourish, yet it indicated how out of touch he was, living in a past era. If that was where the adviser stood in the social scale, where

ranked the common herd, the pearl diver and date picker, the adolescent plying her trade in the red light district?

There came to mind correspondence I had maintained with Joan Firth, a Bapco clerk, who said once, "I think we could produce a musical. You write the words and I'll compose the music." I dismissed it as scatterbrained.

Yet a little imagination could have turned Bahrain's Gilbertian set up into theatre. The cast in court finery - shaikhs and adviser and resident - were ready made. Words would not be necessary: the performance mimed.

There was Belgrave's problem: he was no communicator. I think I knew the reason why - his stammer. Never having conversed with him, I could not know the severity of his disability, nor he of mine. Too well I knew the affliction. On my mind are imprinted moments of terror, embarrassment, near tragedy stemming from infancy, when I found I could not speak as others. Mine was not a staccato stutter but a blockage when my vocal organs refused to function. There were times when it was like reaching an abyss, where a bridgable leap to the other side is too terrifying to take. Let one example suffice.

My grandfather moved on crutches after losing a leg in an accident. My grandmother was blind. They were in their sixties and I aged five when we went together for a day at the seaside. The old man disappeared into a pub leaving me to shepherd Grandma home. From the destination station, the lane to my home was ill lit, meaningless to the unseeing, and taking Grandmas's arm to steer her, I had the duty to call "Step!" when we reached a kerb. But when we got to the edge of the pavement, my voice failed. I was mute. Grandma stumbled on the kerb and fell forward, almost full length. She was a tall, spare woman and took a dreadful purler. We struggled together to help her rise. She was winded, and I suppose shocked. As she straightened up, using her hands to feel that no injuries were obvious, I managed to speak through my tears. "Oh, Granny, Granny - I am sorry!" She was a gentle soul. She could have scolded me but she uttered not one word of reproach. It had been such a happy day and it had to end this way, disastrously. For better or worse, this dysfunction was a conditioning factor in my

life. It certainly held me back. But I sought to camouflage it, to compensate, especially after a drink or two on social occasions, when I was able to assume another identity, an alter ego able to play the fool and even say funny things. And repartee let words issue unthinkingly, while singing brought fluency.

It fooled other people too. One of the amateur drama producers stopped me in the street in Awali once. "We're doing a farce for the next show. I'd like you to play the lead," he said. I just stood open mouthed, rooted to the spot. I managed to explain it was quite impossible without telling him the truth. He seemed put out by my refusal. I couldn't admit that given a script I would have been speechless.

I was in my middle thirties when, writing a summary of London County Council evening classes for my newspaper, I came across "Speech Therapy, Drury Lane." I joined the class of Margaret Penwill, therapist, and was instantly shocked by a roomful of men and women almost writhing in agony as they tried to utter a single intelligible syllable. It was so distressing that I decided to stop stammering, since when I have spoken regularly at public meetings almost without qualm.

Who can say whether Belgrave, caught in good time by a Miss Penwill, would have developed another, more outgoing, personality, better attuned to life and aspirations in Bahrain? But then, fluency might have borne him to the pulpit as the Reverend C. Dalrymple Belgrave, a parish priest somewhere out in the sticks!

Summing up, Belgrave observed that during his time state revenue increased from about £75,000 to around £5½m a year. When only a few had education, Bahrainis concerned themselves only with local affairs. People were happy, sectarian differences apart. Living was cheap and tastes simple and girls married at the age of 12.

Three decades on, in 1959, Belgrave pointed out, Bahrain was unevenly coated with a western veneer. Six cinemas were crowded every night, and TV was picked up from Saudi Arabia. Over 7,000 vehicles crowded the roads, groups of hideous European style bungalows had sprung up. Arab dress had become old fashioned among the younger men. Girls were marrying at 16 or 17 or when they finished school. People were healthier; they had electricity and

piped water. They travelled on buses or on bicycles instead of donkeys.

Could he have returned another 30 years on, he would have seen the western veneer more evenly applied to a country which, notwithstanding the introduction of modern technology, the trappings of capitalism, lush hotels and the like, and vehicles numbering some 125,000, remained firmly embedded in the Third World.

While his name has been effaced, of one thing he would be proud. Bab al Bahrain, Gateway to Bahrain in Manama which Belgrave designed in 1945, a solid building with a traffic archway, an administrative centre where adviser and ruler had offices and which looked straight to the markets, still stands, both a symbol and a striking example of no-nonsense architecture.

Charles Belgrave died in 1969. His son, James, worked for a time in Awali and later became a fellow director of a Conservative Member of Parliament in a London publicity firm which handled the Bahrain Government's public relations. A tragic irony, after formative years spent in an alcohol-free environment, James, like his wife, died prematurely from drink related causes.

Belgrave the adviser left diaries which are housed safely in a library. Alas, it is said they shed too little light to be brought out into the open.

"THE old order changeth" fitted modern Bahrain, superficially. But for the Khalifa family, the old order, the absolutist political system, remained. For them, any change could be summed up as bigger, better and more.

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" was not a theological statement but a matter of everyday practice. The ruling shaikh, the Amir, was not only monarch of all he surveyed but omnipotent.

What would his father, Shaikh Sulman, have made of it? He, the most photographed creature in the whole Gulf of his day, never commissioned a portrait for public display. Apart from a few pictures used in oil company publications, snaps taken of the old man were locked away in private albums. And now his first son, Isa, the lissom youth become plump cheeked in middle age, cast a stern smile on the populace from each and every angle, from every nook and wall in public and private places, in shops, offices, homes and hospitals. There was no escaping that face, nor those on either side, his brother and prime minister, Shaikh Khalifa, and his son, crown prince Hamad. Open a book, an official publication of any kind, and after the title page appeared three whole page coloured portraits. In a bilingual book, the pictures occupied both ends.

There could be no doubt as to who was master of Bahrain. And to leave none in doubt that he was still alive, if not entirely well, the Amir was given an airing by press and TV every day.

One way of consolidating power was eliminating the past. Out went old street names - Daly and Prior as well as Belgrave - and thus were significant chapters torn out of the history books. Other than inanimate names like Government, Palace and Exhibition Roads, only Khalifa shaikhs were remembered by streets, with a Saudi ruler immortalised in King Faisal Highway, the feeder to the Arabian-Bahrain causeway built by the Saudis.

The Khalifas were a remarkable family and not simply because they hogged the limelight, the street names and the best jobs in public administration. Their fecundity was astonishing: breeding like rabbits, somebody said. In 1953, I asked a palace servant to put a figure on family numbers and he said "about 500." I repeated the question in 1991 to the information minister, Tariq Almoayed. "Between six and seven thousand," he replied.

I was amazed and said so. The United Nations had once forecast a doubling of global population in 35 years, by which test the Khalifas should now be around, say, 1,200. I could not believe the minister's figure.

Extrapolating on the Khalifa scale, reigning family in relation to general population, the British royal family, the Windsors, would now number well in excess of one million. Imagine all of them marrying their cousins, qualifying for state hand outs and getting jobs in government!

Almoayed did not shrink from his assessment, explaining, "Remember, we marry young in Bahrain and have more children, and now we live longer." He turned to tiny Shaikha Nayla: "How many brothers and sisters have you got?" Shyly, she answered, "Seven." That doubtless was a sign of underachievement.

The phenomenal growth of the family might have been linked to a belief in safety in numbers, but it seemed to ignore the problems posed by global overpopulation. When I photographed the known sons of Shaikh Sulman in 1953, they were teenagers. They looked little more than boys, three happy go lucky lads. I had no inkling that the eldest, Isa, already had a three-year-old son, Hamad, who was to become crown prince and commander in chief of the Bahrain Defence Force at the ripe age of 20. Hamad, according to one source, married late, at the age of 18, and had three sons and a daughter; while another authority claims he judiciously married princesses in the Saudi and United Emirates' ruling families, up to the quota of four, and had a host of offspring.

Amir Isa, born in June 1933, is credited with nine children and numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren. An Englishwoman who had been sunning herself on the beach at Zellaq described how the Amir approached her and two other women from

his adjacent beach. "He asked us to come and join him in a little celebration. He said he was so happy at the birth of his new grandchild, the 54th." Marrying cousins, a tradition in Bahrain, has kept power and wealth in families. It should occasion no surprise if offspring exhibited some degree of mental or physical handicap, yet publicly there was little if any evidence. An American woman who was teaching English in a school used by Khalifas spoke about some of them: bright kids or lazy, backward ones, and a lame boy, almost blind, propped up coming into class. I asked for more details, but what I heard led me to doubt I was getting all the truth.

One obvious trait was lack of inches. I think it was Belgrave who had drawn attention to the small physique of Bahrainis in general; which no doubt made the tiny Khalifas feel better. If inbreeding and stature were linked, an illustration might be found in the local cats, emaciated creatures which appeared never to develop beyond the size of kittens.

From a slim youth, the Amir put on many inches, but none in height. In company, he appeared to be standing in a hole. Princess Anne had to stoop when greeting him. Night after night, television showed him going through the routine of rubbing noses with, or kissing, government ministers or foreign dignitaries, and when they refused to bend down, the poor Amir had to stand on tip toe to reach them. It was embarrassing to the point of grotesque. Why did nobody ever think of giving him a platform to stand on?

What kind of man was he? A senior courtier went on the record in a pamphlet called 'March towards welfare and prosperity' written for the Guidance and Culture Division of the Bahrain Defence Force. He wrote that the Amir "has imbibed modesty and simplicity and is known for his gentleness and magnanimity. He looks after the sons of the soil and fulfils their needs, as a result of which his people are devoted to His Highness in all sincerity and dedication."

These archaic phrases (remembering Bahrain currently had few "sons of the soil" after impoverished Bangladeshis had replaced them) brought to mind the lofty sentiments coined by old Shaikh Abdulla's speechwriters for the doing away with "this sordid daily fight for bread and butter." The propensity for translating into English official books and pamphlets which clearly were designed

for local, Arab, consumption was curious. Come to that, why should anyone believe that English readers would be beguiled by these bromides any more than Bahrainis taught at some expense to use their intelligence?

Picturesque language employed to eulogise local potentates tripped easily off the tongue or pen. But did the British foreign minister Douglas Hogg really say in a Kuwaiti newspaper interview that the answer to the latest Bahrain-Qatar frontier dispute might be "a brotherly solution using the mediation of The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahad bin Abdul-Aziz of Saudi Arabia"?

If the airs and titles assumed by the descendants of desert tent dwellers seemed to border on the absurd (though they had not yet got round to The Second Lady of The Bedchamber) they could claim that superior aliens, notably the British, put them up to it by bestowing ranks and flummery, like Highnesses and Excellencies and Knights Commander of this Most Noble Order or that.

It worked the other way when the well known firm of Thatcher & Son, purveyors of statecraft and armaments, dropped in on the Gulf states. The Amir awarded the ex-prime minister the Ahmed al Fateh Order (a comparatively recent innovation, Ahmed the Conqueror, after the original invader) and the Daily News had the headline, BAHRAIN HONOUR FOR WAR HERO THATCHER. She had been deposed before the fighting began but had played her part. Iraqi weapons pointed at British forces were marked UK Origin. As evidence given to the Scott Inquiry into arms deals confirmed, her Government had been blithely equipping Saddam Hussain directly or through agents.

There are more pressing problems to tackle than dismantling obsolete orders and customs, yet their anachronistic, even insidious, nature deserves recognition. The British Government's Department of Trade still warns exporters who visit Arab countries not to point the soles of their shoes at the locals. Such gestures - eating and drinking with the left hand is another - are supposedly offensive. In relation to hygiene, they had a purpose in earlier times. But times have changed. It is but a short step from behaving inoffensively to abasing oneself in pursuit of gain. The first three-man survey team sent by Standard California to Arabia carried the king's warrant, but

they feared to be conspicuous as foreigners. So they grew beards and dressed up in Arab clothes. At that time, Ibn Saud was still a cult figure, a mixture of Don Juan and Genghis Khan, and his exploits were well documented. His personal cut and thrust regime meant hand to hand combat during the day (he threw at least one severed head to the village boys for a football); then at night he serviced his wives, who ceased to be counted after numbering a hundred.

Such goings on would not be countenanced today. Urban Saudis have urbane ways. It must be comforting to foreign traders to know that one way to win orders from Arabs for their valuable wares, from hairpins to Centurion tanks, is to wear a collar and tie in their passport photos.

When Isa acquired the family heirlooms, most of the land, islands and continental shelf, the palaces, the horses and wild gazelle and birds of the air, it must have appeared that materialism needed a human face. For the illiterate, denied the chance to read about their ruler's wisdom, benevolence, munificence, etc, the enlarged smiling portrait, mass produced by the tens of thousands, was a boon. There was the danger of course of familiarity breeding contempt. I quickly developed a blind spot when confronted by shaikhly visages on walls and TV screens and in the pages of newspapers and government publications. In Moscow and Leningrad, busts and portraits of Lenin were at that moment being cast out; while in Manama workmen were erecting along the main highway more giant portraits of the Amir. '30 Blessed Years - God Save the Amir and the Country' read neat captions in Arabic, alongside advertising slogans.

Knowing the Muslim's abhorrence of graven images - the mosque permits no idols, icons or human or animal representation - I wondered if the Khalifas were pushing their luck. I put it to a pair of Arab newspapermen that the ruling clique were overdoing the superhuman role. Omniscient, omnipresent, unblemished... might not they be usurping the place of God?

The journalists were horrified. Such a blasphemous idea: how dare I entertain it? The opening declaration at prayer was clear: There is no god but God, Allah! "You know that and I know that," I said.

"But do your rulers know it?" It was a subject they did not wish to pursue.

As the ultimate temporal authority, the Amir, if reports could be believed, never missed a trick. By tradition, he maintained the common touch, taking on the roles of citizen's advice bureau and ombudsman at his twice-weekly Majles, where any subject might, in theory, come to complain or beg or present a petition.

Nothing was too big or too small to command his attention. He could summon a captain of industry and offer him advice on running his business. He kept an eye on public information and banned newspaper weather forecasting after the BBC fiasco over the great storm in Britain in October 1987. The ban was lifted and then, while I was in Bahrain, came flooding rain, thunder and lightning in defiance of the press prediction of "Fine."

He must have had "a good intelligence system," declared Ron McGowan, a Gulf Air captain who was based in Bahrain in the 1970s and was one of many Europeans drawn into exchanges of pleasantries by the Amir as he regularly sunned himself on the beach at Zellaq.

Pilot and ruler met again at the palace when His Highness gave a dinner for some 30 Evangelical Church Council members and wives and Shaikh Isa greeted McGowan with, "How are your daughters now?" The girls had undergone a harrowing experience when the aircraft returning them to school in England was hi-jacked by terrorists.

"How did he know who I was and about the girls?" said the incredulous father.

The Amir had to keep an eye on his own family as the burgeoning flock made demands for largesse. McGowan learned from a Shaikh Mohammed, occupant of a secure but middling airport post, that Khalifas were sorted into three grades. Mohammed confessed: "I am in grade C. When I want to take my family on a foreign holiday, I go to the palace and pick up economy class tickets and a small sum of money. Grade B shaikhs get first class travel and more money, and grade A travel first class with a lot of money."

Primogeniture is normal practice in the Gulf and the first born son follows his father as ruler until he dies or is deposed. The theory is

that the ruler secretly nominates his successor, who happens to be his oldest son, and by coincidence family consensus finds he is the best man for the job. Isa, who succeeded his father, appeared safe though his health was giving grounds for concern.

His son, Hamad, known *inter alia* as deputy amir and heir apparent, had been marked down for the succession for over 20 years. Could one detect a rival? I noticed in the papers that his cousin Ali, the prime minister's son - a mere under secretary for passports and immigration - was getting lots of media exposure as he met rich and famous foreigners day by day.

As departments of state, health and education were important, but they lagged behind two directed by non-Khalifas: the ministries of industry and information. Industry brought in the dollars and dinars from oil, gas, aluminium, docks, transport and other undertakings. The minister, Shirawi, headed some concerns, including Bapco of which he was chairman. It was said that he had an arch rival in information minister Almoayed, who was reputedly a workaholic.

Information ministries tend to be regarded as propaganda vehicles. British governments have established them in wartime, but at other times government departments run their own communication networks. In less developed countries such as Bahrain, the information department is a multi-faceted instrument for telling people what the rulers decide they should know, while keeping from them (by censorship or other means) what they should not know.

One of the problems facing information ministries is knowing where to draw the line. Where tyranny prevails, leaders and governments ride roughshod over citizens. In Bahrain, where the Government preferred a quiet life, one would have expected authority to take the public pulse occasionally in case the natives were getting fevered and restless. How could public feeling be gauged? There were no opinion polls for rating popularity. Letters to newspaper editors, at least published ones, studiously avoided any controversy. Did feedback come, as many claimed, from spies and agents in our midst?

The conspicuous presence of armed security men on street corners or guarding public and private buildings presumably conveyed a message. I asked Al Moayed why the information ministry needed

so many men in olive green or flak jackets, occupying the yard, standing on stairs and sitting on office landings, weapons at the ready. He replied, blandly, "The broadcasting station is next door."

The ministry's prime tasks included promoting the interests of the Amir, his family and other government departments and, of course, its own interests. The minister made sure his own picture was prominently featured in the daily press.

A stream of official handouts, in words and pictures, flowed ceaselessly into newspaper and TV offices and were dutifully relayed to the public. If the prime minister popped in to see his brother for a few minutes, it was thus reported in the press: "HH the Amir Shaikh Isa bin Sulman Al Khalifa yesterday received the prime minister, HH Shaikh Khalifa bin Sulman Al Khalifa."

Let any Khalifa meet his relations or anyone else and it got into print via a press release. The daily dose of columns of names and titles of people who had nothing to say would have been familiar to Victorian readers of *The Court Circular* in the London press, but it insulted the intelligence of the modern reader. And this whimsical nonsense was turned out on some of the finest printing equipment this side of Wapping on Thames.

Tiny pictures in newspapers of unrecognisable figures were replicated on TV screens. Every night the Amir appeared, with half veiled face, in a large chamber with seated bodies propped against the walls, separated each from neighbours by individual tables, looking like embarrassed dummies. Occasionally a mouth could be seen to open, but no sound escaped. It was like the old silent movies, minus animation and captions. No announcer was on hand to put the viewer in the picture. The sole accompaniment as the camera panned back and forth was a blaring military band recording of *The Stars and Stripes*, *Anchors Aweigh* and *Sousa* masterpieces. The point was made and taken: the Amir was alive! Saudi TV used the same format. Even the same marching tunes. One had to sympathise with Dr Hala Al Umran, TV head, daughter of the first director of education, trying to make something out of nothing.

At this juncture, one might ask if tiny Bahrain was attempting too much, given its physical and human resources. Was there any sense in striving for an infrastructure and services appropriate to a major

nation, meeting all needs at home while supporting diplomatic missions in foreign capitals and at the United Nations?

Censorship, including the more onerous self-censorship, was something editors had learned to live with. It might have been inadequacy of editorial staff rather than censorship that made reporting of local events so dull: no court cases, no accidents, no births or marriages, rarely tragedies, no criticism, in short very little of human interest. And yet the papers in English were full of blood and guts, murder, rape and mayhem, political intrigues and financial scandals, sex romps and civil wars, elections won and lost, rulers overthrown, life in the raw as life was lived. But those were the happenings of New York, Rome, Croatia, Moscow, the Far East, the West, Iraq and Iran, even Kuwait and Dubai in the Gulf. Saucy pictures of royalty were permissible, British royalty. It was all happening, everywhere. Except in Bahrain. This little island was free of such sordid goings on.

Of course, one could read between the lines. When the Philippines' ambassador in Pakistan urged his Government to halt the traffic in housemaids to Muslim countries because of abuse, he named no names, but readers in Bahrain could guess.

The Daily News did a centre spread on me with the headline 'Bert maps out a stroll down memory lane' and some scenic pictures from my collection. The Arabic daily Al Ayam (The Days), tipped off about me, sent two men to my hotel. A long interview was fairly reported, so I heard, with mention made of political dissidents I had known and my wish to meet old friends, in particular Amer Mohammed Amer. Decorating a whole broadsheet page were enlargements of my pictures of Shaikh Sulman and his sons. It was an impressive display, I had to admit, even though I could not read the text and I used the page as an introductory leaflet whenever I called on Arabs. Strangely, hardly anyone admitted having read it - I suspect circulation was minimal - but several people were fascinated by the photos and rushed to their photocopiers to reproduce the page.

The Moayed family, whose commercial and industrial firms were widespread, had come some way since their first Arabic letterpress weekly in 1952, printed on coarse newsprint that yellowed and

crumbled when exposed to daylight. As information minister, Tariq automatically had a controlling interest in the news media. A relative, Ebrahim, was chairman of the Gulf Daily News.

Al Ayam was interesting. It occupied two buildings so close to its neighbour, the Jufair naval base (now American), it was almost like CND having an office in the Ministry of Defence in London. Before the paper started in 1989, the buildings belonged to the information ministry. The Government gave them to Al Ayam and subscribed half the capital, a managerial co-operative putting up the other half. The paper was produced with the newest technology and a battery of tapes spewed out an unceasing chatter of news, in English and Arabic, from the main international news agencies. The general manager, Ebrahim Bashmi, had been taken to court in the 1970s for writing an article about the abuse of imported housemaids, which he called a new slave trade. He was acquitted but then he was arrested as a political dissident and spent five years in prison without a trial. He reckoned Belgrave had been too paternal, like a father doing everything for his children, not giving them a chance to do things for themselves. He agreed self-censorship, which his paper had to practise, was more demanding than official censorship. He said Bahrainis did not want revolution but they did want change..."five or ten per cent change a year."

Revolution was not a word on the lips of everyone. Too often, in fact, no words came at all. Political questions were not for discussion. "Why not?" I asked a civil servant. "Do they jail you for criticising the Government?"

"No," he replied, "but you risk your job and promotion."

The places to go to hear what people really thought of the Government were the bars at night, he said. But sitting through the thumping cacophony of a disco bar into the small hours was political investigation I could well do without.

Whether Khalifa rule was oppressive or benign depended on your standpoint. Every system throws up winners and losers. The UK and the USA are vaunted standard bearers of a participatory democracy that denies legions of citizens basic rights. Minus democracy, Bahrain does not threaten its neighbours with war. There is no personal income tax. Liquor is available to all who crave it (to the

chagrin of the nightly meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous) and jobs for almost everyone (in the absence of unemployment benefit, no work means no money). The state provides health care, education and pensions at 60. Sunshine is abundant. One could fare worse. There are laws to protect workers against unscrupulous bosses and to lay down industrial standards. Yet some were exploited by private employers who preferred foreign workers who would put in 12 to 15 hours a day for low pay on work shunned by Bahrainis. The authorities, having turned a blind eye, were now aware of surplus labour which could only be absorbed by adherence to the legal hours of employment, 48 hours a week, with overtime payable for excess hours.

A constant two-way traffic leads Bahrainis to foreign parts to learn the latest techniques in welfare, science and industry, while specialists come to Bahrain to hold seminars on defeating cancer or beating the computerised fraudsters who cane the banks. But men who want to get on complain about Khalifas acting as a brake, or hurdle, to their ambitions. A young graduate in state service under a Khalifa head said, "We go to university in England or America and come back with an MA or a BA, qualified for a specialised post, only to get stuck in an inferior job with progress blocked by an incompetent Khalifa."



East Rafea village boys.
Below: Muharraq schoolboys.



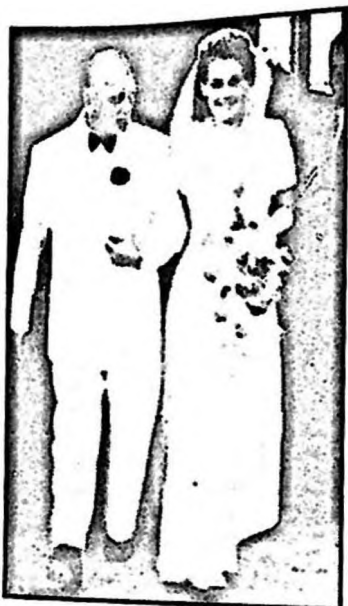
Time for a smoke in a Manama coffee shop.
Below: Gateway to Manama, Bab al Bahrain.



Headmaster H. Jishy.

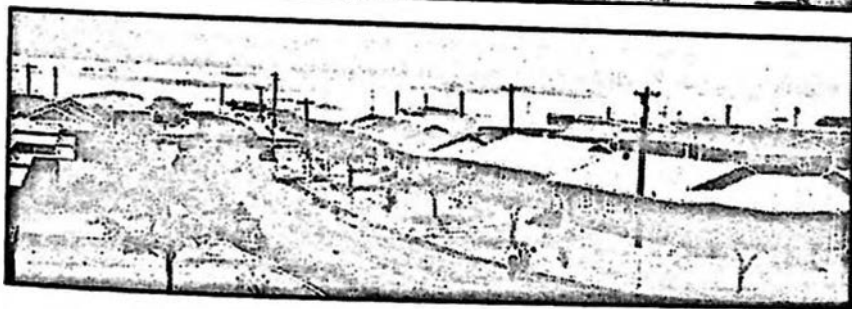
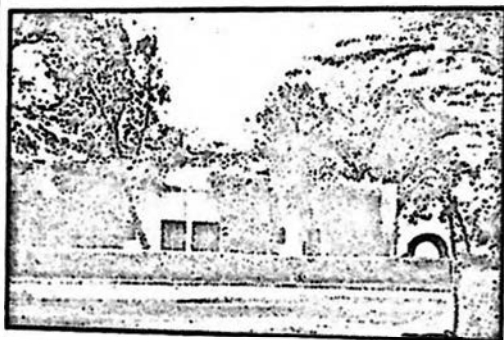
Below:
Dhobi wallahs
thrashing
laundry
on the
stones.



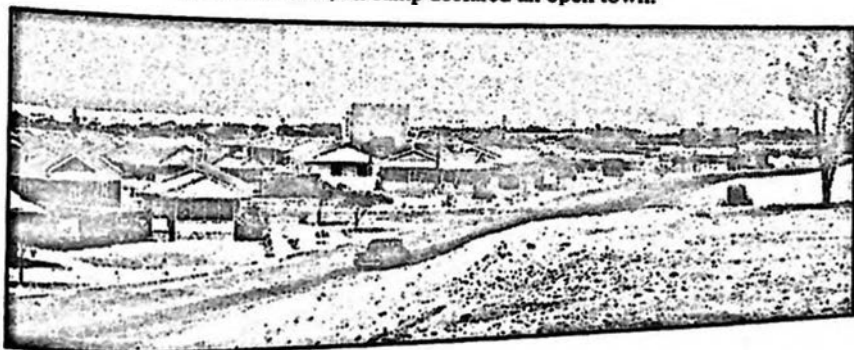


Oilfield romance led to the altar of Awali Church for these Bapco employees.

Below: A section of the spacious home in the manicured grounds occupied by Bapco's general manager.



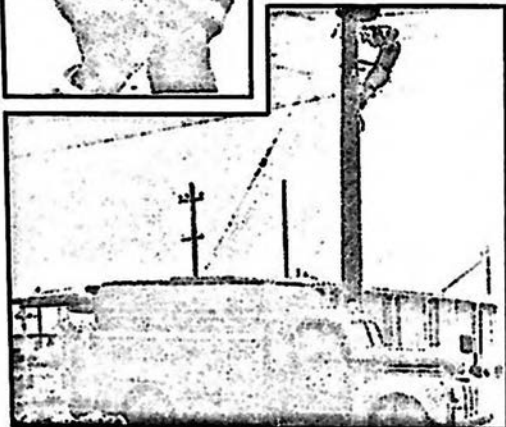
AWALI in 1953, oil camp declared an open town.





Invading locusts
captured by
bunkhouseboy.

Right: Guard at
Awali Gate.

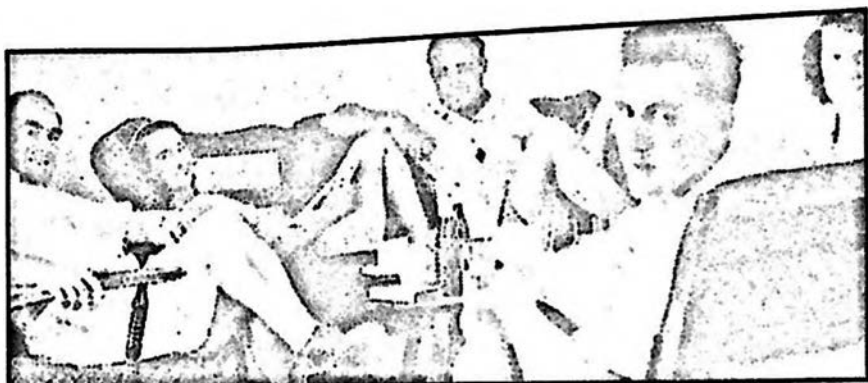


Left: Bunkhouse storm
damage repairs.



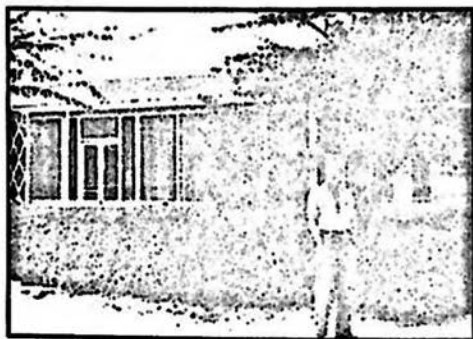
Oil workers take boat trip to Nabbi Saleh Island, where (left)
Phyllis McLelland poses with local lad.
Below: New Year's Day soccer, Awali English versus Scots.





The 'casino' bungalow in Awali.
My roommate, Colin Bowling, outside
(below) while indoors relax (from left) Eric

Partington, Patricia Ryan and Dennis
Wells with a visiting couple.



Author at work (below) with garage
mechanics and (right) playing
Carmen Miranda in the Bapco Club
at Christmas 1951.





Our bus
from
Kuwait
to Basra.



Left: A
doctor's
sign in
Baghdad.



Iraqi border guards at Safwan, 1953.

Left: Political leaders in the making,
Baghdad Institute of Fine Arts.



Palestinian
refugee
camps in
Beirut.



A GENTLE hint from me brought prompt response from Bapco chiefs: an invitation to stay for a couple of weeks at Al Dar. There in Awali I could pursue my research and help the company with its archives.

The transfer to elegance was a pleasure and I allowed the cabman to cheat me over the fare from Manama without a murmur. In any case, he was an engaging type; born in Bahrain in 1933, of Persian stock. As a youth, he worked in Bapco's transport department for three years and then left to work for a contractor in Arabia before returning to become a taxi driver. He remembered the Belgrave years. "The people got Belgrave out, but two or three years after he went they were crying to have him back."

Much of our conversation had to do with money, that terrible affliction. Take Shaikh Mohammed, the younger brother of the Amir and the prime minister. He was never mentioned in the media or in polite society. "He is only interested in making money, grabbing land for development." The driver waved an arm towards a tract of desert enclosed by a high wall. "That's one of his developments. His brothers can't get through to him. There's no contact between them." The driver described an easy way for anyone to get into property. First, save up 10,000 dinars, then change them for sackfuls of Iranian rials on the unofficial market, enough to buy a pair of fine houses in inflation hit Iran. Not that he had considered that. He would never go to Iran while the Ayatollahs were in power. Besides, he had been buying his three-bedroomed house in Isa new town since 1976. I thought he said he had a 20,000-dinar mortgage, which sounded a lot of money, £30,000 in sterling. It was a Government loan, and the Government was very good, not pressing for repayments if times were hard. No question of being evicted for default.

In Awali, standing on a higher slope, I let my gaze wander down and around. Everything, almost, was exactly where it had been. Behind me, the Bapco Club. In front, the commissary, now a private supermarket; opposite that, the main office block; to the left the cinema. Then the bungalows in small estates, the church, the second swimming pool and tennis courts. The bunkhouses, of course, had long been swept away and now there were vacant bungalows, so that a new employee could bring his family with him.

Greenery and landscaping were more abundant. The saplings of old were now full grown trees, each still with its own water tap to ensure survival. The main roads were properly made up and well lit after dark. Yet something was wrong, very sadly wrong: where were all the people?

Awali was not a camp or village any longer, but a town. Yet the wire fence still surrounded it and guards manned the entrances. Indeed, the barbed wire was back. When I mentioned it to residents, they said they were not conscious of the wire and perhaps it had gone up during the Gulf crisis.

Racially, Awali was much changed, to some extent reflecting ownership and control of the energy industry. Natural gas was a major resource and wholly in state hands. Bahrain's own oil, from the original fields and from new land and offshore wells came under the national oil company. In the absence of government marketing facilities, this part of the industry was run by American owned Caltex. Bapco, meanwhile, had been trimmed to a refining company, with all its offices and works concentrated inside the refinery's boundary. The Government owned 60 per cent of Bapco and Caltex retained the other 40. As ever, most of the crude oil refined in Bahrain originated in Saudi Arabia.

Awali, taken away from Bapco, ceased to be exclusively for white staff and families and eastern domestics. When Bahrainis obtained senior management posts, some chose to live in the more favoured properties. With its ethnic and social mix, and wives working in offices, schools and hospitals, connected to oil or not, Awali was an oil company town no more.

Some services were farmed out, the grocery store for example. Outsiders were allowed access to Awali's amenities, the hospital,

cinema and club, etc. Curiously, the 600-seat luxury cinema which was due to open shortly after I left in 1953 was closed by its private operator a week before I returned to Awali. "Why?" I asked an Indian serving in a video shop adjoining the cinema.

"Only 25 people were coming to performances; no profit in it so they closed down. The cinema is dead."

He spoke the truth. This cinema was dead as the dodo, extinct as the dinosaur. I examined its mouldering grey facade in the darkness. It looked pathetic. This was the very spot that all those years ago was the very hub, the beating heart of Awali by night, the open air movie theatre of booming sounds and flickering screen, where the animated multitude assembled for pleasure. Now there was silence, dead silence, and not a soul to be seen.

People had told me they preferred to stay at home to watch video films. I mentioned that to the man in the shop.

"That's right. Videos have taken over from the cinema. The films were six months old, anyway."

He said over 7,000 video titles were available for hire. I pointed out that he had no customers while we chatted. He said, "It's very quiet just now, for the past few days: since BBC world television started on channel 55. People are watching that, it's very good." He was watching it as we conversed.

I said, "So video kills the cinema and now TV kills video. Does that make you redundant?"

"It's not that bad. The schoolchildren will be starting Christmas holidays soon. Videos always pick up then."

Institutions that had stood the test of time included the church and the hospital. If not rebuilt entirely, the church had been remodelled, now boasting fixed pews, stained glass windows, air conditioning and concealed lighting. Services were more frequent, on Fridays as well as Sundays, and the Catholics now competed with three other sects - Anglicans, interdenominational and Philadelphians - who, had they all combined, could have made up one good congregation.

In the formalised atmosphere of the Anglican service I attended, it seemed outrageous that a young couple allowed their two infants to rampage among the pews, crying, squawking and rolling hollow sounding objects along the floor. An Englishwoman and an

American were plainly discomposed as they read the lessons, and the priest, without a note, battled to maintain the flow of his sermon.

Awali hospital was now private, meaning available for fee paying public, explained the principal nursing officer, Miss Curran, a sister from Glasgow who did a term in Saudi before coming to Bahrain. Bigger than it used to be, its silent, carpeted corridors led to departments full of state of the art machinery. It was virtually the private clinic of the palace at Rafea, five minutes by car, and it was here the Amir was given emergency treatment after a heart attack. More specifically, it was recognised as the Khalifas' maternity wing, where senior and wealthier women of the dynasty had their many babies. Of the 12 doctors, two were paediatricians and two obstetricians. All were expatriates. The nursing staff, too, was largely British, with some Indians and a few Bahrainis.

The lesser orders of Khalifa could seek their preferential treatment in the Defence Force Hospital, or attend public hospitals, where doctors might be Arabs who had trained in Bahrain to recognised standards but who - to repeat a charge levelled against Bahraini engineers and other skilled men - had "a question mark against their commitment."

Awali hospital had shrugged off its racial divisions. All oil and gas employees were screened and treated free, while families in Awali paid nominal fees. It had witnessed the changes experienced throughout Bahrain, where the bland statement, "The general state of health is not bad," concealed many problems and trends. By improved hygiene and vaccination, malaria, TB, cholera, respiratory complaints and other diseases had been conquered, only to be replaced by lung and breast cancer, diabetes, blood pressure, obesity, the marks of good living and wrong diet, tobacco, alcohol and drugs, not to mention lack of physical exercise.

The effect of the recession and Bahrain's general low wage policy was beginning to tell on expatriates. Medical personnel, oil staff and engineers and men and women in other occupations were complaining that their tax free salaries failed to keep pace with expenses. The welcome improvement in hours and holidays enabled foreigners to go home twice a year, but this meant spending more.

Now fewer jobs were available, pay was more closely related to home rates and, in place of the traditional fixed contract periods, renewable on a jobs-for-life basis, many firms were seeking to take on employees as casuals.

Some employees complained of anomalies in salary scales tied to inflation, claiming that workers on sterling rates might get a ten per cent pay increase in a year, while those paid in dinars got only a three per cent rise, the supposed Bahraini inflation rate being one per cent. Further to confuse matters, when the currency was changed from rupees to dinars, 1½ dinars equalled £1 sterling. Later the dinar became tied to the US dollar, sterling slumped, and one dinar equalled £1½. Some wage earners gained, others lost.

Like other factors, subject to supply and demand, wage rates in the Gulf were failing to attract new recruits from the west, it was said. I met an oil engineer, a Belgian, who was leaving Awali after five years to take up a lucrative job in California. He asked me about the old days and greeted my recollections with approving nods and gestures. Things hadn't changed much, he reckoned, and he was glad to be quitting Bapco. He believed he would be hard to replace. A recruiter was now in India interviewing seven applicants for his job, fearful that none would be suitable, he said.

The Belgian invited me to his farewell party, a rather dismal affair attended almost exclusively by Americans. "Don't go," he said as I was about to leave. "I want to show you this letter. Read the last paragraph."

It was a short letter from the Bahraini head of Bapco's expatriate administration dealing with travel arrangements and concluding, "Please accept our thanks for your service and our best wishes for the future."

The recipient told me, "I made ten copies of this letter to hand to people. When I read the last part of it yesterday, I sat down and cried for two hours. I could not stop. I did not realise they valued me so much. I could not believe it."

Agreed. I could not believe that a thank you note was worth two hours of tears. This new breed were not like oilmen of old. When we quit, we never waited for thanks. No tears, just expressions of joy! Now as then there were quitters, but stayers too. I was surprised by

the numbers of British, husbands and wives and single men and women, who had become so attached to Bahrain that they could not contemplate leaving. Not that they expected or planned to leave their bones or ashes there, for without a job retirement had to be taken elsewhere. Thousands completed a contract and then signed on for a second or third, or stayed to set up on their own account with a local partner. Ten or 20 years seemed to be unexceptional. I asked a long serving woman who was teaching English to nurses if she wanted to go home. "Oh no," she gushed, "I love it here."

A woman from Tyneside, a part time assistant in Awali's commodious lending library, had observed the changing scene over 30 years with her oil worker husband. They, like others in Awali, lived what was called a normal life, which meant spending their leisure very largely at home in front of a TV screen. The various sport and social organisations now had their own separate clubs where they could drink with their peers instead of massing at the Bapco Club.

The veteran expats must have amassed tax-free fortunes that would assure a comfortable life in more equable climes, but one place was as good as another to live in for the unadventurous. It was not a hard life; no modern convenience was lacking. One didn't have to go native or learn to speak Arabic. One suspected a lot stayed put because they simply could not face the trauma of uprooting and moving.

A change of scenery, even of daily routine, could be disturbing, witness the reaction of Alf, ex-Jeddah, when on arrival in Bahrain for a job interview he found himself sitting alongside Arabs supping alcohol. It was quite alien, ordering drink from a waiter instead of making your own (contractors in Arabia supplied their expat workers with a spirit still and operating manual, 'Blue Flame,' for 100 bucks complete).

Easy access to alcohol should have endeared Bahrain to Alf, yet I had a feeling it was not for him. There were too many buts. After the repressive mainland, Bahrain was liberal, but... The house he could have in Awali was "all right, but they only provide basic furniture. You have to bring out your own curtains and utensils and

things; of course, they ship it out and it doesn't cost you anything, but..."

And another thing: "They want a safety man, but I'm a safety engineer. That's what I was in Saudi."

I asked, "How much are they paying here?"

"It's £26,000 a year; only half what I got in Saudi. Still, the money doesn't worry me. I've got a quarter-million in the bank."

He flew to England to consult his wife, leaving an impression that he would not come back for the job. Bahrain was all right, but a bit of a culture shock.

My return to Awali brought the old boys from the bunkhouse up to four. We had all roughed it, at least one forced to double up, and all started on the lowest rung of the ladder. They stayed, persisted and prospered. It was a toss up who should be deemed oldest inhabitant. Stuart Reynolds, now deputy chief executive of Bapco, joined first, a few months before I did, but he had moved around the world, promoted by Caltex at every step. The present chief executive, Don Hepburn, arrived in 1956, but he too had been a globe trotter before returning to Bahrain.

No, the man who deserved an award for taking root was Ken Foxall, who started in accounts in 1953 and had not budged from Bahrain for 38 years, apart from leaves and two short training courses in America. He had officially retired but had been persuaded, without too much pressure, to stay on for an extra year as a computer consultant.

In the course of their long careers, they must have met thousands of oil men. Yet when it came to choosing personalities, the same names cropped up. Reynolds said he remembered Eric Partington well: "We were in the same bunkhouse, number 65." All had a clear memory of Bob Dickinson, alias Shaikh Rashid, and his tragic end. All three - the executives and their wives and Foxall, single - were scheduled to depart in 1992 to retirement homes.

Although the Bahrain Government had a majority shareholding in Bapco, expatriates still filled the highest management posts. Hepburn was being succeeded as chief executive by a Manchester-born Canadian in early 40s who had long refinery experience but had not come up through the Caltex ranks. Hepburn was more

diplomat than technocrat, a large man in a sharp suit, usually seen in earnest discussion with government ministers and industrialists.

Reynolds was an engineer, a burly figure who had, according to reports, been whisked back to Bahrain on special assignment. The refinery, with over half a century of history clocked up, was nearing exhaustion or worse and if rebuilding at a cost of billions of dollars was put off to the mid 1990s, it would need careful nursing in the meantime on a maintenance budget of 20m dollars annually. One refinery was not like any other. Each was unique and would respond only to a knowing touch. In the whole Caltex empire only one man could handle the Bahrain refinery, a man who grew up with it and knew all its foibles. That man, they said, was Reynolds. He was recalled from distant parts to save the refinery and bring his career to a stirring climax.

He was a Londoner, from Acton, and an engineering apprentice before coming to Bahrain at the age of 22. He had a brother, Gerry Reynolds, Labour MP for Islington North, who was a Defence minister in Harold Wilson's 1966-70 Government and died in his early 40s. With homes in south-east England and Florida, Stuart Reynolds and his wife aimed to make the most of variable climates in retirement.

Retirement seemed to be something Ken Foxall wished to put out of mind. In his last working year, he was sure he would not end up in Cyprus, the retirement colony for expatriates. He might try a year in Bath or Cheltenham, or settle in the Cotswolds, a region he liked. He gave the impression of a man who would have to be dragged away from Bahrain. He had matured with it and acquired pleasant memories. In the early days, the club in Awali had been the hub of social life, but now one could spend leisure in Manama, dining in any of the many good restaurants, he said.

He arrived months after I left, but some of his duties mirrored mine. One was pay day at the refinery. Another was manning the Tote on race days. "I refused to continue doing the Tote," he said, "because Belgrave used to lay on a dinner afterwards for the Manama volunteers and left us from Awali out."

Conversation with these men of my generation threw up numerous familiar names. They seemed to be aware of everyone's last known

whereabouts, who was dead, who alive in their dotage or surviving in comfort on fat pensions. There was even a regular gathering of the clan in England, when 300 or more Awali veterans took over a hotel for a weekend and relived old times and made merry. As for famous names, there were not all that many. But Bob Dickinson's had not been forgotten.

His was a celebrated case become legend, which shed or gained a nuance in retelling, though the gist was reliable. The Muslim convert and his Catholic wife appeared happy and reared four children. Dickinson was fond of a drink and found no difficulty reconciling that with his new faith. Others did, however. When the time came for other Gulf rulers to demand that their nationals have equal or shared facilities with westerners in their clubs, the Kuwaiti and Saudi governments slapped liquor prohibition on all.

Bahrain continued with the ban on Muslims, which led the oil company to complain that club waiters were being abused by Arabs who resented being refused alcohol freely served to others. Bapco argued it was not its job to determine who should have liquor and the Government eventually responded by repealing prohibition.

Before that happened, questions were asked about Dickinson's position. If he was a Muslim, why was he allowed to buy drink? The management had to make a decision. The commissary was ordered to stop delivering alcohol to Dickinson. Whereupon, he renounced Islam.

The next stage in his saga was the arrival of a young woman in accounts who flaunted her charms as none had done before. She introduced the miniskirt to Awali and each morning regaled office colleagues with vivid reports of her amorous adventures of the night before. Dickinson became besotted with the girl and announced his intention to marry her. When reminded he already had a wife, he countered, "I'm a Muslim. I can have four wives."

Word reached the British authorities in Manama and Dickinson was cautioned about the perils of returning to England a bigamist. He separated from his wife, found a mullah to marry him to the other woman and returned to England with her. Trouble swiftly engulfed him. His new bride took him for every penny he possessed and then left him for a doctor.

It was downhill for Dickinson. He stayed in oil, but as a forecourt attendant at a filling station. Friendless, penniless, the one time accountant and actor made a dramatic end to it all, in front of a railway train. He wasn't much older than 40. Such a waste of life, he was a nice guy, the old timers said.

One night in Awali, I awoke in the small hours, disturbed by an unusual sensation of melancholy. I felt abandoned and alone. Ghosts are not in my line, so there was nothing to see. It was the emptiness I sensed: a great living throng swept away. What had happened to them all? Some hours earlier, I had stood on the hill outside the club and looked down on Awali. Apart from two lines of street lights on the main avenue, all was dark and still. Once in a while a car rushed by, but not a soul stirred. It was uncanny.

This had been an oil camp. On such a night, before our rest day, this street would have felt a steady tramp of feet. Chaps going back to the bunkhouse after the evening meal, more coming the other way to the cinema or the club. Houses ablaze with light showing where the parties were about to commence. And the proper noises to suit all these activities.

Now that very thoroughfare was silent, deserted. The cinema was closed. On one side, beyond the desert oval marked for cricket, the school, the church, the tennis courts and pool, the ranks of bungalows were sunk in a hush, scarcely a light visible behind curtained windows. It was a terrestrial Marie Celeste.

Where were all the people? In the Bapco Club lining up drinks on the terrace tables, or getting ready for the first quickstep from the band or record player?

I went into the club, magnificently resurrected after a fire. A fine place laid out with expensive carpets and tasteful furnishings, a banqueting hall, cocktail lounge, bars, ballroom, snooker room, video room, two ten-pin bowling alleys of professional standard. It had everything, including waiters standing around with vacant expressions. But members, people enjoying themselves, where were they? Two Arabs occupied a snooker table, while another watched. Two young Asian women were glued to the large screen in the video lounge. I crept out of this leisure palace and looked down the hill to

the dark vacant street. A lump rose in my throat. I was, it was, so sad. But time does not stand still.

Whoever arranged for my stay in Al Dar ('The House'), the Bapco guest house, must have wished to erase the trauma of the bunkhouse. Comfortable and plush, yielding nothing to a classy hotel, it provided me with not just a room but a suite, full of essentials and most known audio-visual apparatus, down to a navigational aid for the prayerful, an indicator pointing to Mecca. It had grown a bit over the years, though still all on one floor, and while it used to be for VIPs it now took anybody in. Residents took care to maintain a reverential hush most of the time and the Indian stewarding staff glided softly over the pile carpeting to serve all wants: free Scotch or coffee for guests or sober lunches for captains of industry gathered around the long table in the gilded boardroom. The versatile staff under Goan manager Francis were quite professional, moving easily from office work to menial chores, and seemed to spend much of their leisure working as waiters at private house parties. Those who sent remittances home to wives and families in India, visiting them for six weeks each year, shared houses rather than dormitories in Awali.

One, who had left a minor civil service job in India ten years earlier, told me he started his Bahrain career at the Bristol Hotel in Manama. It was all right at first, until it changed hands. The new landlord, an Arab, had a brother in law who drove a taxi and brought a special type of client to the hotel, where Arab and Egyptian girls were available. My informant said his unease grew until one day, irritated by a client who was pestering him for a girl, he snapped at the man: "Look, sir, I am a receptionist not a pimp!" He and three others handed in their notices that day. After four years of bustle at the Bristol, Al Dar was cloistered calm.

The guest house put up all classes oriental and occidental, Caltex men and women, contractors' men, engineers and accountants. A quartet of young German musicians, who gave a classical concert in the Bapco Club, stayed overnight.

At its inception, Bapco set about establishing a good stock room. So distant from equipment manufacturers in the US and Europe, it built up substantial stores of spare and replacement parts and hardly

ever threw anything away. This warehouse and inventive engineers who could turn scrap into working parts had proved invaluable, particularly during wartime. A good deal of make do and mend was still going on, but reliance had to be placed on imported experts, hence the steady procession of foreign engineers and repair men through Al Dar for a few days and nights.

My 16 days put me in the long stay category, but Big Jim, a diesel engineer from Albuquerque, New Mexico, was heading for a record by spinning out his planned few days to a month.

Jim was a strange one, not exactly humorous but likeable, an opinion I stuck to even though I felt sure he was taking me for a ride, a procedure I disapprove of. If he manipulated the truth, he did it with some conviction and no trace of malice. He was a master of the soliloquy and when our paths crossed, as they did most days at breakfast, we established a rapport: he did most of the talking and I most of the listening.

He was a tall man with a large bony yet muscular frame and a lean, weatherbeaten face featuring deep set eyes and moustache. With a big hat, he could have passed for a movie cowboy. He looked in fair shape for a man of 57. His light hair was thinning, but enough remained to interest the Awali barber, who charged half a dinar to trim it, which was quite cheap, Jim opined. What did I think of it? I said it was quite good, though it really looked weird, a fringe all round his crown, like a tasselled lamp shade.

Jim's tastes were simple: money, a cabin cruiser and a fishing boat, and three aircraft, only one of which he could now fly by doctor's orders. His wife earned 50,000 dollars a year as a nurse back home, about the same as he earned engineering his way through Egypt and Syria ("Bahrain beats them all") and Beijing, where he would have to return shortly, or next year some time, perhaps. He also made around 15 grand a year from his photo agency ("Here's my card," he said) which geographical and like magazines called when they wanted an aerial view or some picturesque native scene. "I always carry three or four cameras around with me. You need them; they get clogged up with dust," Jim explained.

Jim was the real Ambassador for America type. He had come up the hard way, studied hard, always gaining more certificates. He

worked hard (passionate for diesel engines) and he acquired possessions, quite apart from endlessly roving and spreading goodwill. Alas, his family didn't understand him. He must have run up an enormous phone bill, almost daily calling home to see how the kids were. The kids, who had presumably reached some stage of maturity, were a problem. They chided him: "Dad, you work hard, you've got all these qualifications, you've got boats you never sail, you travel everywhere making money...and we never see you. What's the point of it all?"

They had the wrong idea, said Jim. He had put them through good schools, but they didn't want to study. Certificates and qualifications meant nothing to them. They wanted to be workshy layabouts. So much for his parental shining example.

Jim always beat me to the breakfast table, giving him time to flick through the Gulf Daily News, read the front page and prepare a short homily based on the banner headline. The key issue of the moment was the long awaited start of peace talks between Jews and Arabs, and Jim was able to state categorically more than once that he had the solution: Israel should pay rent to the Palestinians for the West Bank and other occupied land.

That settled, the next subject was his health, especially his operation, followed by a scholarly dissertation on diesel engines which was all Greek to me. He stood in awe of nobody in his world of diesels and pumps and the minute detail in which he spelled out their workings won sage nods from other experts at breakfast.

As to his health, a turning point or watershed, Jim had shown great presence of mind at that time of emergency when he phoned the US equivalent of the British 999. Every morning, when he surveyed his bare torso in the bathroom mirror, he marvelled. The deep scar down his chest, which none but himself was privileged to view, was the evidence of what might have been.

It happened three years ago, he said. "I had this heart attack, very bad. I would have been a goner but I had a pager with me, fortunately. I called up 911 and the medics found me. Had to cut me right open down the chest to get at my heart..."

"I had to give up smoking, best thing I ever did. I feel really fit now. I go out in the morning at 20 minutes before six. I walk down

to the office block, then cross the street and so on. Then I come back here and do 20 press ups. I feel great."

A waiter had just put two fried eggs, bacon and toast before me. Jim scrutinised my plate. "I mustn't have any eggs or bacon or fats. I never touch them."

He turned to the waiter and pointed to my plate. "Is that ham?"

"No, sir, bacon."

"Bring me some of that, will you," said Jim.

"With eggs?"

"Just whites, no yolk. Can you cook just whites?"

The waiter pondered. "Never mind," said Jim, "just bring bacon."

The thin strips he received he wrapped in paper napkins to soak up the grease. He ate with relish, with his fingers, and repeated the performance every morning thereafter.

The next time he dilated on the happy outcome of his heart attack, I was ready with my own remarkable recovery from cancer of the larynx. Mine was not a dramatic collapse. After 40 years of addiction to tobacco, latterly hand-rolled and unfiltered, the chickens had come home to roost. I allowed my health to deteriorate perceptibly for a year - while friends voiced alarm among themselves but said nothing to me - and then, sensing the seriousness of my condition, I sought treatment.

Good fortune directed me to the Royal Marsden Hospital in West London, where, to obviate the stress of long daily travel, I was granted the status of living in out-patient, afforded a pleasant bedroom in the former nurses' home and not merely privileged but pampered for six weeks. After a hearty breakfast at a civilised hour, I attended the clinic for a daily shot of radiation, a sensation free event occupying a few minutes, and usually the rest of the day was my own. It was like built in convalescence. The late autumn was fine and mild and most days I perambulated, sighting the seedy and salubrious sections of Chelsea and Fulham, sauntering along the Thames banks, exploring the West End or touring the Victoria and Albert and other major museums. I found time too - until the last days of radiotherapy reduced me to nausea and lethargy - to work at my own request in the hospital grounds, turning the soil and planting daffodil and tulip bulbs. The disease and treatment turned

many patients off their food, but I loved the cuisine and the lashings of ale. An extraordinary experience ended with my vocal cords saved, as good as new as far as I could tell.

I thought Jim might like to hear the story. Alas, he wasn't listening. He was about to launch into diesels.

Perks helped him keep his livings standards up and costs down. He was grateful to Bapco for giving him a pool car, topped up with gas, for business and leisure, plus a 12-dinar daily subsistence allowance. Then his employer in the States gave a 25-dollars a day allowance, plus out of pocket expenses. This allowed him to go rash. I saw him post 12 cards to one person, each with a single word of text contributing to a 12-word sentence. Jim reckoned he played the game over expenses: "Hell, I don't need the money." He had charged up for films and processing - "That's pretty expensive in Manama" - and for some T shirts for souvenirs. He could have bought more things on expenses, but he believed in being reasonable.

"I don't come cheap," he said, citing a large sum of dollars which his employer charged Bapco daily for his services. There was terrible waste, such as the five days waiting for the job he was to do to be set up. Some of the refinery plant amazed him. So old. "They throw nothing away, these people. They're using two old General Motors submarine engines, back to back, probably world war two. Don't know where they got them, but they sure work OK."

Credit where it was due, said Jim. Bahraini and Indian engineers were highly skilled. But they let things go rusty. "One thing they haven't got in the refinery is a grease gun."

I thought he must be shooting a line, but I did not interrupt. He claimed that a pump was out of action because of a rust-welded valve. Big Jim soon fixed that. He found a discarded valve, unscrewed it, removed a blob of grease with his finger and applied it to the rusted valve. Presto! Pump working again.

He had been attending the refinery long enough to be instantly recognised yet - with his work urgently needing his attention - the security guards refused to let him in. His time had run out. When his passport came back from the immigration department with a visa extension, he could go back to work. Jim was philosophic about that. "It's putting the job back while I sit here in Awali. But I'm paid

more than I could get in the States, so why should I care?" I wondered why security at the refinery was so tight. It wasn't Fort Knox. Numerous uniformed guards, some with weapons and walkie talkies, ran the rule over vehicles and bags and body-searched strangers. Visitors on foot had to squeeze through a tight turnstile. But there were remembered threats, the recent war and, a couple of years earlier, attempted sabotage in the works.

With the Gulf War still reverberating daily in the press, Jim enunciated his views over breakfast and was prepared to entertain brief discussion provided he was not contradicted. He read a paragraph from the GDN, quoting an Iranian source: "About 500,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed during the war in US led attacks against their positions in Kuwait and southern Iraq."

He commented, "We still don't know what really went on. The American Army had these great plough things which threw up sand and buried the Iraqis. They've got pictures in the suq in Manama, arms and legs sticking out of the sand and bodies everywhere. Who wants to look at that?" He winced.

"Why not?" I said. "Let's see the pictures of the carnage. Let's question whether this senseless slaughter took place after the battle for Kuwait had already been won."

Jim half agreed, but it was all Saddam Hussain's fault. He approved of the idea of bringing the Iraqi leader before a war crimes tribunal. It was my turn to agree. I proposed that the American president be arraigned too. And the British prime minister, and the US and allied generals. They all had right - and the same God, they said - on their side. Why should they be denied the chance to defend their actions?

Jim noted the time. "Must hurry to the refinery, I'll be late."

Another day, I pointed out a short news item about Gen Pagonis, US logistics chief, who went to reclaim US Army equipment from the war zone. "Not even one per cent was lost and 99.9 per cent tanks and artillery pieces are all returning," he reported. He had brought to the theatre of operations 12,500 tanks and artillery pieces, 117,300 vehicles, 2,000 army helicopters and transport planes and 350,000 tons of ammunition. At the peak, 541,000 military personnel were involved. American losses were minimal.

I said to Jim, "Weigh that against the losses on the other side, the slaughter of fleeing Iraqi troops and the scores of thousands of women and kids in Baghdad. If you believe what you're told, they weren't killed by haphazard bombing and mistakes, but by pin point accuracy of 'smart' weapons. They were target practice."

He concurred on that point but was unhappy with my contention that it was like Hiroshima without the fall out. He didn't follow my argument that you found a use for nuclear weapons by promising not to use them, thereby giving yourself carte blanche to use any so-called conventional weapons of mass destruction. There was no doubt that the Gulf War plumbed new depths of depravity.

A few weeks before leaving for Bahrain, I attended a Royal Air Force Presentation meeting in Southend. Serving personnel, led by Group Capt Niall Irving, who had been the British mouthpiece in the Gulf, spoke and showed films about RAF life. When questions were invited, I protested that nothing in the presentation touched on war. I asked whether a stage was reached in a bombing campaign when air crew, husbands and fathers, decided enough was enough; that they could not continue slaughtering women and children, as in Baghdad.

The meeting, though public, was obviously packed with ex-RAF men. They set up a chant of "Sit down! - Sit down! - Chuck 'im out!" and only recovered their humour when another questioner elicited the information that America's sheer weight of numbers only overwhelmed the Iraqis after the superior skill and courage of a handful of British fliers laid the path to victory.

Ruffled by my question, the senior officer provided an answer that won loud applause: that on the basis of UN resolutions and the support of the British nation, our Government took the decision to get the Iraqis out of Kuwait and "we all felt we were doing the right thing."

Bahrain was in the war zone, providing bases for aircraft and ships undertaking hostile missions, though its own people were not sucked into the fighting. The war passed over the population's heads, in the shape of Iraqi Scud missiles and the news blackout which meant that local people knew no more, perhaps less, about what was happening than TV watchers ten thousand miles away.

Bahrain's last confrontation with modern warfare occurred in 1940. In the only air raid in the second world war, Italian aircraft harmlessly scattered bombs which were supposedly meant for the refinery. The US was not then at war and American families in Awali sailed home accompanied by a number of employees. By their government's orders, British workers were forbidden to leave the island. Bapco then prepared for war, mustering a Home Guard unit of expatriates. A camel corps of armed state police and levies was formed to guard the refinery and the British military and Bapco drew up plans for knocking out installations in the event of German forces in North Africa sweeping down to the Gulf.

In 1991, I found difficulty in getting people to talk about events which should still have been fresh in their minds. Among British expats, particularly committed Christians, not one could I find who doubted that the war was right. Some were prepared to concede that they knew too little, other than what the propaganda machine fed them, to make an informed judgement.

Undeniable were both the enormity and the immensity of the allied onslaught which came to light after the cease fire, including the heaviest sustained bombing in history, over 88,000 tons, to pulverise Iraq into a pre-industrial state, as the United States military put it, and to terrorise the civilian population. The best and easiest way of coping with that knowledge was putting it out of mind, not talking about it, or else condemning the enemy's provoking us to the point where, to quote the RAF spokesman, "We all felt we were doing the right thing." The allied commander, Gen Norman Schwarzkopf, had no qualms. For America, the war in the Gulf was one of the most glorious in history, he claimed. For himself, guided throughout life by high moral, ethical and spiritual values, he had God's hand on his shoulder, he said.

Experiences related to me suggested that Bahrain did not anticipate becoming a war casualty. Some 30 Iraqi Scud missiles appeared in the vicinity and all but one fell into the sea or were destroyed by US Patriot missiles. Sirens were sounded to alert the populace but to no useful purpose because few heard the warning or it was sounded after the danger was past. In any case, there were no shelters to go to. The Scud that got through landed in open desert,

where it made a large crater but harmed nobody. An Awali resident, Sam Knight, said: "There had been a series of alarms but I slept through the sirens. On this occasion, however, the air shook as the Scud passed overhead. As it landed, about two in the morning, it felt as if the house rose from its foundations. I was scared, I can tell you."

Terror struck everyone in the area as gas masks and protective capes were hurriedly donned. The masks were a problem. British expatriates got an issue from their ambassador and these were much sought after - particularly by Americans - as the most reliable. For the hundreds of thousands of Arabs and Asians, there were no official masks, only the ones sold in the bazaar for ten dinars. There were absurd situations, for instance in Awali hospital, where nurses wearing gas masks tended patients lacking them.

As soon as the war ended, the Government tried to collect them, fearing, some speculated, that in the event of civil disorder, troublemakers in masks would be immune to tear gas. Many Brits held on to their war souvenirs: masks, army rations that the troops scorned, and spoof war bulletins produced by oil workers as a satirical antidote to military propaganda.

Some westerners left the island. Around 800 children at St Christopher's School were evacuated and a newly appointed head teacher suffered redundancy. Oil expatriates who thought about going home for the duration of hostilities were told they could have a one-way ticket. American wives were subjected to conflicting advice: authorities in the States advised them to come home, while their ambassador, a general and an admiral visited Awali to counsel staying put. A wife who left said one of the brasshats made himself unpopular with the comment to women and children, "Don't panic. If a missile gets you, it's not your day!"

On vacant scrubland next to Awali hospital, the acres where the bunkhouses used to be, a tented military hospital to handle 500 casualties a day was set up. It was remarkably efficient, said nurses from the permanent hospital, with steel containers that unfolded to become sterilised, air conditioned, fully equipped operating theatres. They were never called into use.

Servicemen on the island, who were given the run of the drinking clubs when duties permitted, were generally thought to have had an uncomfortable time for around six months. For those encamped in the desert, conditions must have been like those experienced by the oil pioneers 60 years earlier. Air crews alone suffered casualties. For oil boss Hepburn, the abiding memory, one that still brought a lump to his throat, was Thanksgiving Day in Awali as the men awaited the call to battle. He and his wife, Australians, had renounced their nationality in favour of American and with the fervid zeal of converts they gladly invited 250 of the 8,500 US Marines in Bahrain to Thanksgiving Dinner with US families. He was proud to read a citation but the real drama came when eight burly Marines strode to the club stage and, without accompaniment, sang the American national anthem. Not an eye stayed dry.

The whys and wherefores of the battle for Kuwait after Iraq's invasion in August 1990 have fuelled earnest debate and argument which will go on. History will surely indict Britain, the United States and other powers for diplomatic moves and arms sales that stimulated instability and wars in the region.

Whether Saddam Hussain miscalculated the American response to his invasion, believing it a bluff, whether he was a madman totally impervious to human suffering and bloodshed may be matters for conjecture,

Some things we know for certain. President Bush told the world by TV that he was declaring war on Iraq because he had "lost patience" with the Iraqi president. The catchphrase that America would not have fought to liberate Kuwait if it grew carrots instead of producing oil came to be accepted even by the pro-war lobby.

How far this war, necessary and just as many urged, should have been used as a proving ground for the most horrendous 'conventional' weapons ever invented and as an opportunity for America to exorcise the shame of defeat in Vietnam, again one can argue. Novel armaments were used, such as unranium tipped shells. The anonymous launching of missiles from far off ships might have been no more than an update of German deployment of V rockets in 1944, but a new pitch of callousness was reached with the computerised programming of US aircraft which enabled them to fly

and discharge missiles automatically and allowed pilots to disavow all responsibilities, to say, in effect, "Don't blame me. I was only a passenger."

One idea Desert Storm killed stone dead: the lingering hope or belief that there yet remained in the Arab world some vestige of unity, some sense of brotherhood. The Gulf War was every nation for itself, and when it was over and Kuwait and Iraq lay bleeding, their neighbours sought ways of profiting from their plight.

I could not imagine that support for the war was wholehearted in Bahrain. There were too many Iraqi ties. I was surprised as well as disturbed when a public official in Manama, who might or might not have been peddling a government line, told me this story: "A viper frozen and lifeless was picked up by a man who took it home and gave it succour and warmth and revived it. The snake showed its gratitude by fatally biting him. It is so with Yasser Arafat and the PLO. We hate Palestinians for siding with Saddam."

With the ending of the war, nobody believed that America's pledge to secure a new world order would bring lasting peace and democracy to the Middle East. The most powerful, generous and altruistic nation in the world, the United States had yet to produce leaders with the intellectual capacity to assume the mantle of master of the universe without resort to war.

I gained the impression that Western governments, suffering from economic recession, were eager to profit from new arms sales to countries in the Gulf area. Bahrain's Amir came back from the USA after a medical check up with a new agreement for closer military ties, more joint exercises and the strengthening of American bases. Air bases were going up in the empty south, workmen were rebuilding the former RN base at Jufair. A column of new tanks on transporters swept through the streets. At night, the crackle of machine gun fire disturbed the black stillness of the desert. Someone was making a profit.

Unless the bombs are actually falling in the vicinity, war and peace tend to be abstract subjects on which the mind has difficulty focussing, especially after the slogans have been exhausted. It was easy to applaud the good Dr Kissinger - the one time White House apostle of peace whose mission to save the world from itself never

quite succeeded - who suggested the Gulf's problems could be solved by "a swift surgical strike" against Iraq, even though that action resulted in long lasting catastrophe.

A year after the war, people - particularly those who find peace difficult to comprehend - were still hankering for surgical remedies, supposing that blood would wash away all sins. It was absorbing watching an audience at a televised BBC Question Time. They looked a typical cross section of British public, honest, God fearing, thoughtful, who would - had the question arisen - have wholeheartedly backed the most extreme and costly measures to succour a single deformed baby or a brain-dead adult or anyone suffering abject senility on the grounds that life is sacred. However, the question of Iraq came up instead. And called upon to state his views was the British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, championed in the media for his cultural, intellectual and statesmanlike qualities. Unhappy with his response, I wrote to him, "It was my impression that you caught the mood of the panel and of those members of the audience who spoke.

"Would you now confirm that I correctly interpreted your view: that you do not want to slaughter any more 'innocent women and children' in Iraq but you are prepared to do so in furtherance of the aim of getting rid of Saddam Hussain. This being so, would you personally go to Baghdad and do the deed?"

A Foreign Office official replied on the Minister's behalf, describing humanitarian aid Britain was giving to Iraq and adding, "It is Saddam Hussain who bears the entire responsibility for the suffering in Iraq." A plausible case was made out but my questions were not answered.

Suffering in Iraq was still profound a year later, in 1993, the country desperately short of food, drugs and medical supplies, water and sanitation equipment, educational material and other essentials. It was feared 100,000 children would needlessly die in the year. Sanctions which were to have applied until Kuwait was freed, and which were regarded by the US and UK Governments as less effective than war, were biting hard two years after the war, leading a former US Administration senior official to call them "a crime against humanity."

Undaunted, George Bush, making a final symbolic gesture before quitting the White House, ordered a US warship in the Red Sea to fire a missile across hundreds of land miles to maim and terrorise civilians in Baghdad. New president Clinton, on a pretext, made a similar gratuitous attack. When the British prime minister, John Major, immediately signalled support, I wrote to him condemning his applauding cowardly acts. The Foreign Office sent another long reply. It was all Saddam Hussain's fault.

As a change from aggressive naval action early in 1991, Bahrain received a goodwill visit from the good ship Yosemite towards the end of the year. The local head of Caltex, John Weir, and his wife, a truly larger than life couple, invited the US destroyer to send 30 of its 900 complement to a Thanksgiving Day lunch in Awali. One might have expected a rush of volunteers for shore leave; in fact, some had to be press ganged to make up the number. Local American bachelors and Al Dar residents were roped in for the party at which a lavish meal was served with generous supplies of wine which loosened the tongues and raised the spirits of the Lower Deck guests. These were no Jack Me Hearties but sailors of a kind I never saw; in casual civvy clothes, like a bunch of American high school kids.

They were boys and girls, rather young men and women; some 250 of the ship's company, over a quarter, being female and sharing all duties with males. What struck me was that most of them were terribly shy, at least until the wine started to work. Mixed crews, a recent British innovation, had operated in the US Navy for some ten years, though they tended to avoid combat zones. A ship full of sensitive equipment could well do without problems: and so the beer ration was two bottles per voyage, drugs were a minor issue, sex posed no difficulties, but, an Asian woman medic confided, "We get cases of people taking overdoses because of depression."

The Yosemite shipmates had never seen action, but they said they were prepared.

18 Stumbling-blocks

THE BAHRAIN National Museum in Manama, a monument in marble, would not have looked out of place in Athens or Rome, ignoring its serpentine private road system and guards' blockhouse. Standing on a plain by the sea, it had been open only a few years. All that its main hall and galleries lacked were exhibits and artefacts, but as archaeologists were now burrowing under tombs and fortresses, the ancient civilisations to justify the museum were coming to light. Patience, along with modern art, would fill it. In the meantime, limited treasures captivated school parties of all ages. Threading a way through a labyrinth of underused offices, I came to the seat of power and its occupant, Shaikha Nayla Al Khalifa, the Director of Museums and Heritage, a slight woman with bright eyes and a light voice, dressed as an English Victorian. Surrounded by burly westerners in heritage and exhibition trades, she looked so vulnerably feminine it was hard to believe she was the one giving the orders.

These were busy, not to say exciting, times. National Day was near and with it display and rejoicing. Excavation at Saar had just revealed a grave with a skeleton, some pots and two tombstones, provisionally put at 5,000 years old. My historical offerings paled by comparison, though I could guarantee their age and authenticity.

My photos and books and things clearly interested the director, but she tried to appear not too fascinated, fearing perhaps that a hard sell was in prospect. When I said I was giving the stuff away and proposing to split it between Bapco's archives and the museum, she said, "I think everything should come to the museum. Perhaps His Highness should see them. He will be very interested."

I said I felt a certain attachment to Bapco and I would give them such old matter as seemed appropriate. It was agreed that the museum should sift the hundreds of negatives and print enlargements as required. Shaikha Nayla said, "We would like to

see you again. How long are you staying in Bahrain?" I said my air ticket covered 34 days. If my money ran out, I would leave earlier.

Some days later, I was summoned to the Ministry of Information where, between numerous cups of coffee, I was introduced to heads of various departments. Then we all gathered in Tariq Almoayed's office and after a few probing questions from me and some light banter, the minister opened a drawer and said, "We hope Mr Mapp will accept in the spirit it is given, this sum of money..."

I cut him short. "I don't need money. Bapco are accommodating me in Awali for two weeks. But thanks."

I ought to have let the minister produce the cash, just to see its value. But he quickly shut the drawer, changed the subject and ordered the coffee pot to be brought in.

This was a splendid trophy indeed, 15 inches high, silver, ornate, hand crafted, a real souvenir. It was not unique, for a lot of special visitors went away with an Arab pot, though in smaller editions. Mine was definitely king size and I would not have surrendered it for one of the gold watches the Amir handed out.

Almoayed said a few words about friendship and asked Shaikha Nayla to present the gift. The tiny soul didn't reach my shoulder. She struggled to hand me the boxed coffee pot while I tried to shake her hand and the official photographer who hadn't a clue about composing a picture just clicked his shutter and produced a photo which, used postage stamp size in two Arab papers next morning, looked awful. Arrangements were made for me to do a TV interview in a week or so. Two technicians in Arab dress fixed up the recording and lighting apparatus in the lounge of Al Dar, the Arab director in shirt and slacks, not long out of art college in London, fussed around efficiently and an attractive young Englishwoman, Amanda McKee, put me at ease on a sofa. She was a drama student, staying with her father in Awali while seeking work, and whatever the ministry paid her to interview me must have been easy money. She had two questions to ask: what was Bahrain like in the old days and what were my impressions now. So many others had asked me the same questions that my answers came automatically. I gabbled on for probably ten or 12 minutes, remembering in summing up to inject a note of scepticism about progress that the censors would not

find offensive. The director said OK, no need for any retakes. I said, "It'll be cut to a minute or two, I suppose." Nobody dissented. It would be screened, I learned, on an unspecified Thursday evening.

Whatever else might be in the doldrums, religion appeared to be flourishing, with fundamentalism making its mark. While a minaret's loudspeakers boomed a lengthy harangue, shouts of "Hallelujah!" and "Praise the Lord!" to the accompaniment of guitars, cymbals and electronic keyboard issued from another packed hall. Mosques, temples and churches played to capacity congregations. At sunset on a Sunday in Manama, three mosques and the RC Sacred Heart Church battled for the airwaves, broadcasting their services to crowds thronging a central area after work.

The old American Mission Church adjoining the mission hospital had been rebuilt and renamed National Evangelical Church, an odd use of National in an Islamic country. It was markedly international, serving a variety of Christian sects whose services were conducted in Arabic, English, Urdu, Korean, etc. As in communist countries, religious institutions had to register with the government.

As a forbear gave the land for the original mission church, so the Amir came to the rescue of its replacement by giving 10,000 dinars for completion of construction. Isa, devout Muslim, told the pastor, Harold Davenport, that he wanted to perform the official opening of the church, which he duly did.

Since it was built in a hurry in 1953 for around £5,000, St Christopher's Anglican Church had made noticeable strides, now sharing its compound with the vicarage, a hall and a new worship centre. Bahrain's first British school in the grounds had drifted to several scattered sites, where the multi-racial roll numbered around 1,400, Christians, Muslims and Hindus. To maintain a church link, the chaplain took classes for religious instruction.

A short but illuminating history of St Christopher's and nearly a century of Christianity in Bahrain, written by Robert L Jarman, brought into question my powers of observation. My impression of the Rev Rickells, the first minister, had been of an old man whose time was drawing short, when in fact he was only 42. He was a rector in the St Albans diocese in England when he died of cancer

in 1964 at the age of 55. He stayed two years in Bahrain, his successor ten. Later incumbents lasted two, four and six years. Though a small, unimpressive structure, St Christopher's became the premier edifice in the Gulf and, after being transferred to the Cyprus diocese, was upgraded to cathedral.

The successive priests busied themselves in the community, being instrumental in the formation of a Seamen's Mission, The Befrienders (Samaritans) and other organisations of a charitable or social nature. Unknown to me, at the time I was working as a reporter in his parish in 1960, the Rev Derek Taylor was cutting his teeth as an army chaplain at the Shoebury Barracks in Essex.

Now The Very Reverend Taylor, cathedral provost, he was an energetic 60-year-old with an enthusiastic wife to support him in tackling new tasks. They and church officials aimed to raise about 50,000 dinars a year from fetes, raffles and a second hand shop so that giving away a tenth of church income would help refugees, Bangladeshi flood victims, handicapped children and others in dire need. The latest good works were cleaning up the old Christian graveyard and visiting a home for elderly and infirm Bahrainis. The new cemetery was put to less use now that cremation was in vogue, expatriates' ashes being scattered at sea or, more likely, flown home. Here economy might be exercised, a service of which some Britons had taken advantage, for whereas Bapco charged over 500 dinars for cremation at its plant, an open pyre in the Hindu cemetery in Manama could be hired for 200 dinars.

It was Mr Taylor's conviction that no cathedral in Britain held as many services as his in Bahrain: 23 Anglican services in a week, not to mention joint or individual services held by 18 other Christian groups, including Coptics and Indian Pentecostals. The multi-faith character of the churches derived from politics, from lesser sects being in a sense driven to seek sanctuary in a church because the Government banned meetings in houses in case plotters were at work.

"The golden days are over," the provost told me. He meant not the church but the economy. The worldwide recession had not bypassed Bahrain. I arrived as the sales were closing. They had gone badly: 40 per cent and 60 per cent reductions had failed to stir customers.

As in Britain, it wasn't simply that people lacked money to spend, rather a reluctance to spend it, so it seemed. Hard times were feared, the loss of a job, so money was hoarded for a rainy day. My suspicion is that many folk are up to their eyebrows in material possessions. How many more cars, computers, camcorders, keyboards, mobile phones and other electronic toys - not to mention carpets and suites of furniture - does an average working family need?

Construction had slowed as emphatically as it had risen and overproduction of houses and offices had led to a sharp fall in rents in recent years. Since 1985, hundreds of millions had been poured into prestige projects such as the Saudi causeway, the airport, the Japanese designed Gulf University, the national museum, the Grand Mosque and the Bait al Qur'an. This last, an architectural jewel containing priceless manuscripts, enjoyed full time promotion by a younger Kanoo and the patronage of the crown prince who gave it priority over dabbling in commerce.

Arabs would not stand alone in mistaking money for wealth and confusing standards of living with quality of life. Acquisitive, they recognised the symbols of affluence, especially cars. Why, I asked a young Arab just back from university in England and keen on equality, did he need five motor cars. Well, he just liked cars and his rich uncle could afford to buy them for him, that was all. Frequent assertions that ordinary Bahraini families employed one, two, even three imported domestic servants I took with a pinch of salt. Whether employing servants was modern slavery or the former exploited became the worst exploiters, I could not judge. I regard as sordid domestic service of the kind in which my aunts and their friends served apprenticeships in large houses in the East End of London in the early years of this century. Yet today, personal service cuts across class, as legions of "carers" minister to every want of infirm relatives. Bahrain will learn.

By hand or wits, most Bahrainis worked. Not like Kuwaitis, a minority in their own land, of whom it was claimed at one time that only one in five took a job, most of the work being done by immigrant Palestinians. We know what happened: after the Gulf War the Kuwaiti Government deported millions of Palestinians. In

similar circumstances, the Saudi authorities expelled hundreds of thousands of Yemeni workers because their Government opposed the war. Bahrain was too dependent on its vast foreign labour force to contemplate eviction, though overmanning or underemployment among indigenous workers could be seen. The man doing the town clerk's job in Manama offered me this observation: "I would like to pay one man two men's wages and get three men's work."

Again and again, when Bahrainis and work were mentioned together, the words motivation, commitment and responsibility came up. If Arabs learned anything from the British it was surely the art of self depreciation; not the endearing trait it is supposed to be but a sign of helpless inferiority. We can't match Germans for hard work or the Japanese for dedication to the job!

One of modern Bahrain's impediments was a surfeit of PROs and PhDs. Whenever I said that it got a laugh, though it was no joke. In the old Bapco we survived without one public relations officer; now a PR department headed by an Arab contained men and women from the UK, US, Bahrain, India and Philippines, besides an Arabic section which produced a professional looking weekly newspaper.

A PhD in the university praised the quality of the premises and recited the need for a student intake to match. Bahrain was well off for educated people, he believed. Its dire need was skilled artisans. I met American and British engineers who asserted that Bahrainis were competent to take over their jobs. What held them back? Fear of responsibility. The argument ran: if an expatriate engineer is sacked for making a mistake in the refinery he goes home and gets another job; if a Bahraini engineer is sacked for the same mistake, that's the end of his career.

Those who agonised over such issues were not of one mind. Some held that Bahraini doctors and teachers matched foreigners in skill but lacked commitment, while others insisted that professional ethics and caring provided motivation to which doctors and teachers responded with commitment.

The work ethic, once seen as the test of a nation's character, has two opposing principles: plodding perseverance and absenteeism. Old fashioned skiving to attend a fictitious grandmother's funeral and the modern need for time off to visit the dentist are part of

industry's rich pattern well known to the English. As Bahrain's principal employer, Bapco had initiated problems by introducing the five-day week. Later, public offices followed suit, while some private industry was adopting a 5½-day working week. The Bapco works council was at this very moment grappling with the issue of whether employees ought to be paid for time off to visit government departments. A stringent code for staff in state hospitals specified circumstances in which a nurse could take time off to drive a sick or elderly relative to the airport.

Whether questions such as these were of moment or trivial, they were surely signs of progress in industrial relations. The little welfare committee that Bapco general manager Brown set up surreptitiously in 1952 was now a council of management and elected employees' representatives, five a side, which met monthly and whose deliberations were minuted for display in Awali library and elsewhere. The latest report I picked up indicated that similar committees were likely to be set up in other industries.

If the workers, men and women, were beginning to flex their muscles, they were warned by government hints that the correct exercise for the times was tightening of belts. The Gulf War, the 42-day blitzkrieg, for all its devastation was not setting the wheels of industry turning again. It added to Bahrain's financial burdens. The Amir declared that internal security was his first priority. More spent on security meant less for health and education. Doing a U-turn to try to stimulate the economy, the Government decided to encourage privatisation. A long established principle, that foreigners setting up enterprises were allowed to hold only a minority stake, was abandoned. The prime minister promised he would personally cut the red tape to enable overseas investors to come in swiftly and totally control businesses without Bahraini partners.

Existing easy terms for start up were reinforced by new measures which added up to a package that, one imagined, no average entrepreneur could afford to let slip. Apart from the usual freedoms - no income or corporation taxes, excise exemptions (other than 20 per cent on cars, 50 per cent on tobacco and 125 per cent on alcohol), and repatriation of all profits - the Government offered

generous subsidies on wage bills, rent and construction costs. Other inducements included cheap energy and fuel and skilled labour at wage rates only one-third of those in developed countries. What, one was bound to ask, was in it for Bahrain?

After a series of budget deficits, the Government could only look forward to more of the same. While natural gas, petro-chemicals and ship repairing were heavy-industry revenue producers, the real twin pillars of industry, the oil refinery and the aluminium smelter, needed over two billion dollars for refurbishment and expansion. The longer term future was rosy, said government optimists. While a team of six international experts were mapping out an economic programme for the 21st century, Bahrain was "expected to witness an unprecedented boom in the coming five years," according to a finance ministry spokesman. And industry minister Yusuf Shirawi predicted that the Gulf Co-operation Council states (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and the southern shaikhdoms) would double their aggregate oil income by the year 2000. They would raise oil output by a third to 20m barrels a day and annual income from 34b dinars to 71b (£51b to £106b).

While expecting oil reserves to last for 105 years, he added, "The world will require us for 40 years. After that I don't know. It depends on us." The GCC states would concentrate on making consumer goods. The minister went on, "We will use some of our money to develop other resources, I hope in the Third World, like the Japanese are developing resources in Australia."

The challenge of water had been highlighted by UN secretary general Boutros-Ghali, "The next war in the Middle East will be fought over water, not politics," to which Shirawi added, "We have to industrialise water, manufacture it, preserve and recycle it."

As a minor player in the oil league, Bahrain's share from any bonanza would naturally be small and dependence on aid from wealthier neighbours would remain. A traditional role it hoped to maintain, in line with its entrepot days, was as supplier of goods and services to its neighbours, to which end the Government was trying to promote light industry.

Its skill in handling money, derived from Belgrave's preaching of prudence, marked Bahrain out from the other states. It had less of it

and therefore had to attempt to spend it wisely. Offshore banks and other institutions which employ money to make money became an important factor in the economy.

Muslims have an ambivalent attitude towards the use of money, especially where loans require payment of interest which some argue is usury. A religious court in Pakistan had just held that a state organisation charging interest on mortgages violated Islamic principles.

It has been said that financiers from Islamic countries were forced to establish banks overseas in order to handle credit at a lower rate of interest than that charged by the usual banks. In places like Bahrain there are branches of traditional banks and Islamic banks, which might suggest that somehow God and Mammon are both being served. Khalifa shaikhs hold directorships in both.

Since oil provided Gulf states with money to burn, the niceties in handling it have become blurred or neglected. Scandals have rocked several. An illegal market in postdated cheques created chaos in Kuwait.

The greatest outrage of all time, the collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International with its Islamic antecedents and the involvement of the ruler of Abu Dhabi, provided an object lesson. Much as one may sympathise with the victims, the depositors, both simple folk and sophisticated institutions, greed had a role in the shambles.

Bahrain has avoided catastrophes, but Government inconsistency over money shows, even if only in a small way. When the old desert race track in Manama closed down, so did the Tote, which made money to help TB patients. A fine new track was built, amid tasteful landscaping, to provide weekly meetings. Racegoers watch the horses go round but they may not bet. Gambling is taboo.

Yet anyone may gamble in Bahrain by buying tickets for countless lotteries which support charities and causes, or by buying and selling shares on the Manama stock exchange. Speculation in currency is encouraged, one dealer from London recommending it as a better bet than equities. In the financial markets, which include the offshore banks which recycle billions of petro-dollars, institutional punters gamble with someone else's money rather than

their own.

These activities which help to sustain Bahrain's wellbeing must be legitimate and proper. But I wince very time I see, on TV, halls full of young men in shirtsleeve order tapping keyboards and bawling into long distance phones all day long, allegedly trading in something or other. Transactions mean winners and losers and I fear the losers are those who need protection most, such as poor countries. Doubtless I would do such operators a disservice by saying "they toil not neither do they spin," but I was raised among horny handed sons of toil and am prejudiced.

Tiny, remote Bahrain was where any bank worth its salt had a marble palace, or at least a plush suite in another's edifice. Overseeing operations and collecting operators' licence fees for the Government was the Bahrain Monetary Agency (BMA). It was not a branch of the Khalifa family, though the prime minister, Shaikh Khalifa, was chairman of the board of directors, Shaikh Ebrahim deputy governor, and three other Khalifas directors of divisions. Functioning as a state central bank, it kept an eye on 189 institutions at the beginning of 1991, these comprising 19 full commercial banks, two special banks, 21 investment banks, local offices of 50 overseas banks, 25 foreign exchanges and money brokers and 20 insurance companies. Considering that some banks had branches in every town and village, the number of offices was enormous.

According to reports, the Money Business in Manama was the epitome of professionalism. The BMA had foreign advisers in key posts, the banks had their whiz kids. The old money changer who sat on a chair at a crossroads of alleyways in the crowded bazaar, a heavy leather purse on his knees, a few hundred thousand loose Iranian rials in his hands, also had his mobile phone to keep abreast of the fluctuating market.

Did he but know it, he was in a foreign exchange market in which, the BMA reported, dealers handled three-billion dollars a day and provided "sophisticated products such as options, swaps, and other derivatives, hedging techniques, speculative trading and financial engineering services."

The agency's 1990 report was a fascinating compendium of figures. Bahrain's balance of payments registered a deficit of 119m dinars compared with a 71m surplus in 1989. Because of the invasion of Kuwait, a handful of offshore banks departed, there was "a sizeable capital flight" and public demand for US dollars shot up. But trouble sent oil prices spiralling. Bahrain's oil trade surplus rose by 100m dinars during the year to reach 433m dinars.

The 1990 budget was in the red. Government revenues (including grants from wealthier neighbours) amounted to 498m dinars (say £750m) against expenditure of 537m dinars (£800m). Compared with 1989, they represented an income growth of 14 per cent and expenditure increase of 8 per cent. Compared with 1926 when Belgrave first set foot on the island, when the annual budget was roughly £1 per head of population...!

By governmental definition, Bahrainis were "citizens"; all other "non citizens." Whether an unfortunate choice of term or another way of saying "non person" made no matter, for distinctions existed. Heaven help the country, however, if the expatriate props were kicked away, especially the Indian. Taking Indian as the generic expression for Indians, Pakistanis, Goans and Bangladeshis, they were the real gash arbiters, prominent in every aspect of administration, industry, hotel and leisure services, and most publicly observable as builders, shopkeepers and security force. Indians were the true long service men, some now drifting home to retirement after nearly half a century as shop assistants or clerks and managers in the oil company and other concerns.

At six in the morning, Indian construction gangs were mixing concrete or laying bricks on construction sites or digging up roads shoulder deep to entrench power lines and sewers. At night, on overtime, some would still be toiling under weak electric lights. All day, Indians sold groceries and iced soft drinks in their little 'Cold Stores.' Others stood placidly by their wares in the suq, selling textiles, spices, fresh fruit, toys and so on in open fronted lock up shops, closing for a lunchtime siesta, then reopening. The shabbiest alleys contained the greatest wealth, the jewellers' shops full of bangles and gold ornaments. Indians seemed to dominate this trade.

At night, in older quarters forsaken by Arabs for modern houses in new towns, the Indians and Asians who replaced them ambled through the streets or, on unlit bicycles, took their lives in their hands weaving through fast moving motor traffic. At 11 o'clock in ill lit lanes or seedy backstreets, an acrid smell hung in the sultry air. Tiny kitchens, cheek by jowl or in isolation, continued as they had done since afternoon to baste and roast or scorch on a turning spit the fowl and meat they invariably advertised as Grill, Tikka, Kebab, Liver. The cramped smoking galley, little larger than a phone kiosk and exposed at the front, with a table or two and a few chairs, outdoor or under cover, comprised the restaurant. Much effort appeared to bring meagre reward.

At this hour, the little cold stores decided to call it a day, or night. Yet a 60w bulb cast its pallid glow on two figures in a tailor's shop in a silent street edged with fraying pavements. One, sunk knee deep in rolls of suiting material, was coaxing creases with a flat iron, while his partner, seated on a bale, urged a length of serge through his old sewing machine to fashion a hem. Midnight toilers, tailors; Indians, naturally.

Indians proper, from various states but especially Kerala, were reckoned to number 100,000. Better paid men had their families with them, but they were a minority. A street sweeper could earn 60 dinars a month (£90), a labourer 100 dinars and a professional man anything up to 1,000 dinars (£1,500) a month. Renting a two-bedroom dwelling in Manama might cost 120 dinars a month and local Indian school fees 20 dinars a month. Employers provided medical cover for employees but not for families.

Official statistics for 1991 showed average monthly wages for all employees as 260 dinars, broken down into industry averages thus: agriculture and fishing 154, mining 398, manufacturing 225, construction 145, catering 163, commercial 648, transport and communications 364.

While the Government threatened to crack down on illegal immigrant workers, those without two-year work permits, and had laid down strict labour laws, some employers flouted the rules and accepted bribes to provide jobs for expatriate wives. Even state industries connived at illegalities, taking on employees' wives or

family members as "casuals," who were not counted in the permitted quota of foreigners.

Every national group in Bahrain had its own club. In the case of Indians, there was a club for each home state, with an umbrella organisation numbering about 1,000 members. Clubs generally lacked the lavish fittings, swimming pool, etc, of the British Club - the old Gymkhana - but all had the common purpose of selling alcohol, sometimes accompanied by music, and providing sporting and cultural activities. Visits I made to three clubs, hoping to get answers to probing questions, had only limited success. I imagined that if I walked into a Muslim club in Bradford and asked, "What do you think of the Government?" I would be showered with frank comment. But club committee officials in Bahrain politely refused to discuss politics. A fair summary of their views was, "Our people must be satisfied or they would not keep coming back for another contract." Men from Goa, numbering about 16,000, had families with them in about a third of cases. Most wives had jobs, so they considered themselves in the main fairly well off. Those in catering and hotel work could earn 300 or 400 dinars a month, professional men rather more, and owning a car on HP was the rule. A family man with a two-bedroom house in Isa Town had seen his landlord reduce the monthly rent gradually from 180 dinars in the late 1970s to 120.

The Goan Club president, an advertising agency director, whose younger daughter was in hospital critically injured as a result of the older daughter crashing a powerful new car given by the father, said: "Goans are generally happy here, better off than in Goa."

Devout Catholics among the Goans shared worship with Filipinos who started coming to Bahrain in the heady 1970s, had reached about 16,000 and were still coming. They considered themselves educated and skilled and their English gave them an advantage over Koreans working in the shipyard, though they were paid less than Bahrainis for similar work. A Filipino working in the power station said the Government was a good employer, providing a 35-hour working week over five days (7am-2pm, with a 15-minute snack break at 9 o'clock), compared to six days in private firms.

Their club, like the others, had to pay rent for rather shabby premises, 700 dinars a month, which the Government of the Philippines met. The club acted as a consular and welfare agency, supplying advice and collecting money so that people on hard times might have food and a bed or a passage home.

Filipinos virtually monopolised the pop music scene in hotels, male musicians and young female singer-dancers discharging modest talent on three-monthly contracts for a monthly wage of 240 dinars, plus hotel room.

Bahrain without hordes of foreigners would be unthinkable. While nationals outnumber non-citizens, they are less than half the work force. Given the differing origins that Bahrainis admit, they might consider themselves an ethnic minority in their own country.

It was to bolster some kind of solidarity, to demonstrate their numbers, that almost every male Bahraini dressed in the long white robe. I was convinced the shapeless garment was not worn merely to hide obesity but had some deep meaning; such as evidence that while they might break the normal conventions of Islam and the Holy Koran, they were at heart fundamentalists.

I put it to a man of affairs: "Isn't this a show of nationalism?" He sharply denied it. "When the weather changes, we will wear something else," he said. I doubted it. I couldn't see what else there was. In earlier times, as Belgrave had bemoaned, full or part European wear had become fashionable, and then Arab dress was of various colours and qualities. Now this whiteness was total and uniform; and classless.

From the ruling family's standpoint, the mass of foreign labour must have enhanced their sense of well being, increasing the population from that of a small town to that of a large town. And there could be safety in numbers as a dependent work force from the poorer east, from a spread of countries with diverse cultures and creeds, might be considered unlikely material for igniting industrial or other unrest. The shifting pattern of the global economy may cast Bahrain in a new role and force it to cut services and development. But today's expatriates, aware that they are non-citizens with the security of no more than a two-year contract, still believe they have jobs for life if they want them.

A United Nations official, trying to view the scene dispassionately, was cautiously optimistic about Bahrain's future even though it lacked deep industrial roots. He told me: "Bahrainis don't like to dirty their hands and leave that to Bangladeshis and Filipinos. The country needs a broader industrial base and a variety of industries for when the oil runs out and the cheap foreign labour goes home." He added that international experts, such as the UN made available, were needed to train Bahrainis not only to do a variety of jobs but to take responsibility.

I stood in a goldsmith's shop, one of many in a backstreet, and watched young Arab women toying with trinkets. One lingered over trays of bangles, chains and charms and made her choice. She would pay cash, she said coolly, as the assistant handed her the bill for 865 dinars, about £1,300. I calculated she could have hired a couple of maidservants for a year for that sum. Probably she already did.

Without the telephone directory and the electoral register, many of us who communicate would be lost. No elections obviates the need for a register of voters in Bahrain. The public phone book, so far as I was concerned, was a mine of misinformation or misleading information. I was hopelessly lost. The directory was surely not designed to obstruct, but it must have earned the phone company - Batelco, successor to Cable and Wireless - a lot of money in wasted calls. Bahrain had been in the forefront of communications technology as the site of an earth satellite since the 1970s. It took me two minutes to contact my home in England from Awali, but after a frantic half hour trying to locate a subscriber three miles from Manama I gave up in disgust.

The Batelco directory is printed in Arabic and English. To find John Smith, look under S, a moment's work. If there are four John Smiths, identifying the right one is difficult because addresses are not given. So, one could call each in turn till the right one is found; alternatively, ring a friend and ask if he knows the number of the required Smith. Either course helps to swell the phone bill.

That's the simple part. Complications really start with Arab names. A lot of Arabs still have no family names, or do not use one. With or without surnames, Arabs are listed alphabetically by first names,

which results in page after page devoted to Ali, Abdulla, Ebrahim, Mohammed, etc. Imagine the London directory recording every Tom, Dick and Harry as such. Devoid of addresses, the phone book was of little help to me. The answer to the problem was the business card, the printing of which must have been the country's one growth industry. I ended up with a thick wad of cards pressed on me by shopkeepers, teachers, churchmen, civil servants, clerks, merchants, a US naval officer, journalists and a taxi driver with a car phone. The cards bore no addresses, but name, occupation, home and business phone numbers (and yacht phone number where appropriate), plus Fax number and Bleep number. Not to carry a mobile phone was to venture out improperly dressed. Midnight at a pavement coffee table, an elderly white-robed Arab stopped sucking on his hubble-bubble. His phone was bleeping. An offer of an assignation or his broker proposing a share deal?

How would you find someone's address? Simply phone and ask him (if you could find his number). Then, armed with the address, what fun trying to find it when only a minority of streets have names while the rest of the haphazard jumble of roads, lanes and alleyways make do with numbers. (Deliverers ask customers to send a sketch map of their locations.)

"What is your address?" I asked a man I wanted to visit. He replied along the lines of "Area 239, road 5013, building 101, flat 22." Before putting the phone down, he added the identifying key: "It's near Sulmaniya Hospital."

The hospital occupies several acres. I didn't know whether "near" meant north, south, east or west. Having no compass and pair of coordinates, I allowed an hour to reach my objective. Nobody out of doors recognised the address when I questioned them, so I walked round and round till I chanced upon Road 5000. The thoroughfares had no coherent or grid pattern.

Eventually, trial and error triumphed, almost. I stumbled on Road 5012. One to go! It was a tiny street, 5012, with a few houses and a cold store. I asked the Indian shopkeeper if he knew 5013. He scratched his head, then consulted a customer. "Five zero one three? Never heard of that." We all walked to the door, hoping inspiration might guide us. A few houses away, an elderly Arab standing

outside his door observed us and sensed our bewilderment. "What do you want?" he called out.

I went over to him and said I was looking for Road 5013. He said, "Who do you want?" I gave him a name. He pointed to a block of flats standing alone on an area of waste land. "He lives on the second floor," said the old Arab. I found my quarry with minutes of the hour to spare.

On questions of history or current affairs, I suspected Bahrainis would have scored few marks. I was surprised at the number who claimed never to have heard of Charles Belgrave, and more so when men (who would at least have been schoolboys at the time) said they were unaware that Bahrain once had a national assembly. I asked a public library official in Manama if the municipality still had elected councillors. He replied, "I don't know."

Perhaps I should not have been surprised that the media skated over the death of Mohammed Jassim Kanoo, second in command of the business empire. What could one say about the family which probably ranked second after the Khalifas, about the century-old firm which now probably employed more people than Bapco, about good works done, such as endowing a nurses' training centre? A decent obituary on Mohammed would have served as a useful historical exercise. He did not get one.

He died in a London hospital after a long illness and his family, around the bed, hurried his body home to Manama for burial. That much press and radio reported. The Amir expressed condolences and a family delegation led by Ahmed Kanoo later went to the palace to thank the Amir for his condolences. His Highness, it was reported, praised the late Mr Kanoo for supporting economic and commercial activities in the country.

One newspaper epitaph read: "Aged 69, member of a well known merchant family, a founder of Gulf Air." Several firms spent large sums on half and quarter page newspaper adverts to express sympathy. "May Allah rest his soul in Paradise," said one. What Mohammed achieved in his lifetime, what impact he had on Bahrain's social and economic transformation went unreported, interred with his bones. If the family wished to speak about him, I was eager to listen. After a decent interval, I approached the Kanoo

Building and stole into the private office of a head man. He sat stiffly at his desk, an elderly figure, like a white-robed Scrooge.

"My name is Mapp," I said, extending a hand. I displayed my calling card, the page from *Al Ayam*. He spread it before him and gave it a cursory glance, showing no interest. I explained in a few words that I had frequently visited the Kanoo offices in the old days and held regular conversations.

He said, "That would be Mohammed. He died recently."

"I know. I'm sorry," I said.

The office had an air conditioned chill. There was something sepulchral about the atmosphere, the seated figure's tone, his fixed look. "What can WE do for YOU?" he said. I sensed a hint of hostility in the stress. I felt like an interloper and ill at ease. A discussion was not in his mind.

Trying to sound haughty, I said, "Sorry to have bothered you." I offered a curt handshake and turned on my heels and shuffled out.

Strange, all this wonderful Arab hospitality. I had come all this way, after all these years, hoping to renew old friendships. Jishy had rebuffed me. Kanoo offered no welcome. I hadn't found Amer. Might as well close the book.

Then someone said, "Ebrahim Fakhro is still alive. He could tell you a tale. You'll find him in the suq."

I had never met Fakhro, one of Abdul Rahman's gang of plotters who was sentenced to ten years on Jidda. What a stroke of luck if I could talk with him. I went post haste to the bazaar.

The family Fakhroo, also written Fakhro, stood out among the mercantile tribes. A member was the treasurer accused of cheating when education began. Currently, 70 years on, Dr Ali Fakhroo was Minister of Education. The family's shops, largely selling domestic white products, were still squeezed into bazaar alleyways but had also moved out to new towns and suburban shopping precincts. A Fakhroo, Ali bin Yusuf, presided over the Chamber of Commerce. In former times, it was said, the merchant families provided the opposition to Khalifa rule, a likely overstatement, though it was true that some overt rebels originated in the ranks of the business elite. I found Ebrahim Fakhro, a gnarled, slow moving old man, in one of the suq's narrow lanes where the sun's rays never penetrate. His was

a hole in the wall store with a few sacks of tea, dried beans and herbs, far too little one would have thought to yield a living. He sat at a small cluttered desk behind the window.

I produced my credentials, the page from Al Ayam. He, squinting through spectacles and a reading glass, learned about my mission for the first time. He made a few "ah" sounds and then looked up. I said by way of an opening gambit, "I knew Abdul Rahman Al Bakr." He nodded. "Abdul Rahman..." Haltingly, he went on, "I speak no English...not much."

"I don't speak Arabic," I said. I was nonplussed. I had imagined that everybody in Bahrain spoke English. I also felt foolish. During years of trying to learn Arabic, I had amassed something of a vocabulary and could read the script slowly. But I had never used the words and now they would not come. "About Jidda," I said.

The old man tried to tell me about the imprisonment and of his comrade who died. I couldn't make out whether that was during the sentence or soon after release

Fakhro gave his Indian helper-messenger a couple of small coins to fetch me a glass of tea. A large, ancient Arab shuffled in and sat on a bench, hands crossed on his walking stick. Fakhro related to him what little he had gleaned about me and mentioned our language problem. A shame, said the newcomer. No English, eh? He was in the same boat.

Together they said "Be gone!" to an old woman enveloped in black who came to the door and submitted a palm for alms. I finished my tea. Fakhro folded the newspaper and handed it to me. We all stood, it was time to go. We had said practically nothing and understood less. We breathed our salaams and as I was leaving, Ebrahim gave me a relative's name. "Speak to him, he knows."

I tried to find the man. Following an indistinct direction, I scoured the bazaar for a certain shop, there to be told I would have to go to Budeya. I tried a couple of Fakhroos in the phone book, the wrong ones. Then my spirit failed. I gave up and let the trail peter out. A golden opportunity to reminisce was missed.

I WAS IN my fourth week before Amer hove in sight. He had no inkling of my quest, not having read Al Ayam. A Bapco Arab felt sure my man was Rumaihi, a former employee who now ran a petrol station. He gave me a home phone number.

"Mr Rumaihi is asleep, sir. I cannot wake him." The Filipina maid who spoke to me thus over the phone meant she was forbidden to disturb him. It was a few minutes after noon. A curious time to be abed, I thought.

He was wide awake when I phoned later and introduced myself. He could not place me but he remembered a circumstance or two that I mentioned. He explained that he had a long name when he joined Bapco and his supervisor, Grisewood, said it needed to be shortened. He dropped the family name Rumaihi and became Amer Mohammed, and later Amer was recognised as his surname. All very complicated!

When I told him I had photos of him on the pearling boat and wanted to meet him, he told me to come to his office on an industrial estate near the docks. When we met early next day, he was just about recognisable as the man in my pictures, still tall and straight backed but less robust and now clad in Arab white instead of European khaki drill.

I was a stranger to him, though no less welcome. "Forty years, all that time," he mused. So much had happened since those days. He examined the photos closely: "It's really me?"

"Of course," I said.

"Terrific!" he exclaimed.

I spread out the page from Al Ayam on his office table and said it included reference to my search for Amer. His gaze fixed on the top of the page, on the pictures of the Khalifa father and sons.

"Fantastic! Are these your photos?" I said yes.

"Fantastic!" he repeated. "I must have them. Have you prints?"
"Better, I've got the negatives," I replied.

As we sat in the heart of his business empire, I could almost hear his tycoon's brain ticking faster. "You have negatives with you?"

"Yes, in Awali," I said.

"And could they be enlarged, like this?" He described a rectangle with his two forefingers.

"Much larger. I should think. The negatives are pretty sharp."

His scheme was now well advanced. "I tell you what," he said. "I want three sets of big prints. I'll take them to His Highness as a present. He will be pleased."

I could have spoilt Amer's dream by telling him what I thought: that the museum, having had the negatives already, would certainly have done a set of enlargements for the Amir. And Al Ayam, sycophantic as the rest, must have made blown up copies from my prints to give to Shaikh Isa. I could visualise Amer, Rumaihi, bounding breathlessly into the palace: "Your Highness, I proudly present to you this set of prints." Whereupon the Amir responds, "Very nice, Rumaihi. Put them on the sideboard with the others."

All Amer's attention was focused on the photos. He said to me, "My driver can pick you up tomorrow, after breakfast, and take you to the photo studio I deal with in the new town. You could order the prints, you're the expert, you know what size. When they are ready, my driver can pick them up. He will bring the prints to me and deliver the negatives to you. What do you say?"

Here was the neat product of an ordered mind, expressed fluently. Never mind that 40 years had passed and there were memories to stir. First things first: His Highness!

"That's fine," I said.

Amer was happy. His excitement subsided. He asked about my movements. I told him Bapco was putting me up till Friday, two days hence, when I would return to Manama for my last six days. "Haven't the Government put you up? They should do; you've helped them."

I said the Information Ministry had offered money and I turned it down. He thought the Government was being mean, adding, "You must be my guest." That appealed to me. If it meant I could stay in

his villa - and I assumed he lived in style - the chance of living in an Arab household and having long chats was not to be missed.

He continued, "The Palace Inn Hotel belongs to me. I would like you to stay there." He summoned a young clerk and instructed him, "This is Mr Mapp. Book him into a nice room for a week."

"Six days, till Thursday," I said.

"Six days," Amer repeated. "Look after him and charge it to me." I later heard he had leased the hotel to a Saudi company.

Amer's offices kept the usual hours, 7am till 3 or thereabouts. I was surprised when, at around 10.30, he said, "I am going home now." No doubt he was going home to bed, though he did not appear old or tired. He told me he was 62. "If you would like to come to my home, we can talk on the way."

While he drove the few miles from Manama to Budeya, I quickly recounted what I knew of his history, from the pearling trip in 1951, his fulsome letter to the Bahrain Islander (which he did not remember), his appointment to Bapco's first management-labour committee ("I loved that man," he said, recalling that Brown, the general manager, put him on the committee) and finally his scholarship to Beirut University.

Other salient features Amer, or Rumaihi, sketched in. He started with Bapco in 1942, a 14-year-old office messenger who showed an aptitude for picking up English and typing. Company schooling helped him become an administrative assistant in the Arab personnel department, at which juncture we first met.

The story he unfolded was strange. During the troubles of 1965, when Bapco's decision to slash the work force led to strikes and arson, the ruler, Shaikh Isa, was very upset and knowing that Amer was privy to the decision told him, "Amer, you must give me the names of the redundant workers." Whereupon Amer replied along the lines of, "Your Highness, I am a loyal company servant and cannot divulge that confidential information."

"I am ordering you," said Shaikh Isa.

Amer relented and made out a list of the redundancy victims and gave it to the ruler.

The following day, Josephson, general manager, buttonholed Amer and informed him, "You have a friend at the palace and so have I."

He then flourished a copy of the list which Amer had compiled. It was a tense situation and word got to Shaikh Isa that Amer could be on his way out. He had a quiet word with the Bapco bosses.

According to Amer, Josephson indicated that he would like him to quit, adding, "We don't want any trouble with the Government. Tell me what you want."

Quick as a flash, Amer responded: "A petrol pump!"

"You've got it," said Josephson.

"And a supply of gas." "It's yours."

Amer then said, "I've mortgaged my house but I need more capital."

"We'll give you a low interest loan," Jo-Jo promised.

So budding entrepreneur Amer quit Bapco after 21 years. Leaving someone to run his new filling station, he journeyed south to Dubai, then starting its oil boom.

He recalled: "I worked hard there and made a lot of money. I came back in time for the shock rise in oil prices. There was no stopping then. The money just rolled in and I started various businesses." He paused, then remembered how the road from rags to riches began. His starting pay with Bapco was one rupee four annas a day, and after saving up for 18 months he bought a cheap radio. His father berated him for this unnecessary extravagance, whereupon his mother pointed out that he had worked for it and should decide how to spend his savings.

"I've always worked hard. I have this urge to work. When I go abroad I delegate to my managers, but I keep in touch. With these computers and things, I can press a button anywhere and instantly know what's going on in the business and I can make decisions."

When we reached his home, Amer made an inventory of his successes: a current company handling expensive ornate wrought iron work; 40 rented houses and his own villa in Bahrain; homes in Cyprus, Boston (Mass) and Tunbridge Wells in England; the hotel with ancillary bars, night club, pizza parlour and Hole in One donut bakery, not forgetting the filling station and a 32ft cabin cruiser brought ashore when the wartime Gulf was being mined.

He said, "There's a lot of greed in Bahrain. You know, money isn't everything."

"That depends how much you've got," I interjected.

He helped people, he said. He brought old Bapco labourers to his home if they were on hard times.

His own career had probably reached its zenith. He had declined offers of ambassadorships: his businesses needed his attention.

I said I assumed he was a multi-millionaire. "What do you intend to do with your fortune?"

He said his four daughters had good jobs in their husbands' businesses, while his adult son, who was prepared to work so long as he could start as managing director, was undeserving. "I may leave my money to charity," he said, hesitatingly. "Perhaps endow a foundation."

He conceded some of his success to good luck, though more to solid endeavour. "I employ a gardener. But I still mow the grass myself sometimes," he said, indicating the modest garden behind his villa. "Friends say a man in my position shouldn't have to do that, but I do it for exercise."

I knew the feeling. Where I cultivate a ten-rod allotment, fellow ploholders, men and women in their seventies, some with two plots, dig and sow and weed and water, and load their bikes and shopping trolleys with sacks of spuds and parsnips and onions, and cabbages and things. They don't have to do it.

Amer had a nice house, open plan with a part sunken floor, glass chandeliers, a surfeit of costly carpets and English period furniture offset by a plain upright piano and framed sketches on the walls.

The maid served beer to him and tea to me, by request. I asked him about his young second wife, allegedly 30 years his junior, of whom I had heard people speak. Was it true she was Polish and now in England doing a long course on herbal medicine? True, he acknowledged. He would speak frankly to me, he said.

When he had been abroad selling Scandinavian houses or studying in Scotland, people used to say, "Where is your wife?" He realised the importance of having a travelling companion, so after his original spouse refused to budge from Bahrain, he gave her a house and a pension, and presumably a divorce.

In England, ten years ago, he met and married his Polish bride. "A lovely woman," he confided, proudly. Unhappily, there was a tragic

twist to this story which others, not Amer, related. A man from Tunbridge Wells that I met in Manama said he remembered the local press headlines. It seemed that while Amer and his wife were househunting in the Kent town, they left a young son in their Rolls. His older brother, five, was standing behind when the car rolled down an incline and killed him.

Midday approached as Amer reached a suitable halt in his history. Time for bed? He summoned his driver, a young Indian and the three of us went over the drill for the morrow. Take the negatives to the studio and order prints; when ready, deliver prints to Amer and return negatives to me.

I took the hint that it was time to leave. Amer and I shook hands, each thanking the other for favours done or anticipated. Our brief meeting was a final one.

As he drove me back to Awali, I invited the chauffeur to speak his mind about his employer. Tales were told of jumped up, ignorant Arabs who belittled their better educated Asian employees and overworked and abused them. The driver thought warily before answering and I gained the impression that Amer was more or less fair in his dealings and correct in his manner.

The driver arrived punctually next morning to take me to the studio, where I showed the boss my pictures in Al Ayam and explained that large prints were required. I handed him the negatives in their tissue envelopes. As he held them up to the light, I fancied he suffered a tremor of excitement. Here was one more who believed that buried treasure had been unearthed...and he was holding it in his fingers. Big coloured portraits of His Highness were ten a penny, the streets were decked with them, yet it was an old black and white photo from an amateur that stirred emotions.

The processing chief, an Indian, was called in to give an opinion on the negs. Age had not dimmed them. They were strong images and would blow up well, he said. What size? I pointed to a calendar on the wall, "About that size."

The man said that should be OK. "Ready on Sunday."

That was four days away. It took me ten minutes to knock off prints in a blacked-out bedroom at home. "Three prints of each. And we want the negatives back," I ordered.

The driver clearly understood instructions: to collect the prints for his employer and bring the negatives to me at the Palace. Inn. I received nothing on Sunday or Monday. I guessed Amer had been given the whole package and, perhaps unwittingly, was holding on to the negatives. It didn't bother me. I was in his debt for the hotel. Funny, nobody knew Amer, but everybody seemed to know Rumaihi and not just because his nephew was famous as a disc jockey. Miles away in Sitra, I happened to mention Rumaiha and some council employees said they knew all about him. We compared notes. They had a fuller brief on his domestic arrangements, but I already knew enough to satisfy my curiosity.

"Tell me," I said, "how is it you know so much about Rumaihi?" One of the men answered, "We are Arabs, we love to gossip."

Yes, of course, the oral tradition.

Oral meant *sotto voce* in Manama's modern law courts where proceedings might as well have been in camera for all that word got out. If justice was done and seen to be done, it was not heard. Perhaps it was hardly surprising that the media did not report court cases. Though, as a government handbook said, an attraction of Bahrain was its "crime-free way of life."

Outwardly designed like a fortress, the complex was light and airy inside, with numerous small courts ranged round a paved terrace which offered a splendid view of the sea. In one room a dozen men were handing over rolls of notes - 50 dinars, 80, 100 - to two security men with surprisingly good grace, two or three giving me a wry smile, indicating maybe "We shouldn't have got caught." I imagined they were paying traffic fines.

My interest was in the criminal courts, the main one no larger than a living room, with a high bench occupied by three magistrates, the chairman in Arab costume flanked by Egyptians in western suits. A clerk at a narrow desk occasionally jotted down notes but otherwise took no part. Two benches inside the entrance provided seating for about a dozen men, and between them and the magistrates two horizontal bars of wood, left and right, served as witness stands and lawyers' lecterns.

An announcement by the chairman in Arabic brought one, two or three unkempt characters from the public seats to the defence stand.

Each responded to a question from the chairman and then, at his behest, sidled up to the magisterial bench where proceedings were conducted in whispers. At the end of each brief hearing, the chairman dismissed the defendants or litigants without announcing any decision for all to hear.

Three women lawyers came in separately to make a submission to the bench and I followed them out to try to speak to them and to seek information on the events in court. Two women brushed me aside, claiming they did not speak English. The third handed me over to a passing male lawyer. To be thrice rebuffed seemed more than coincidence. Had I committed a cardinal sin, approaching a woman without being introduced?

From rigid purdah, women had attained status I had not expected, but emancipation it was not. Women still had a place, inferior to men's. When men poured into the mosque for prayers, two women sat on the steps, left and right like bookends, totally shrouded in black, hands cupped for alms.

If a woman sat on a bus, an unrelated man dare not take a seat beside her. When adolescent girls, black veiled, came out of school in droves they climbed into ancient hired buses. No walking home for them, it seemed.

The education minister said girls did well at school, often outshining boys. He added, "We have women doctors, professors and teachers, and a quarter of engineering students are female. Women have ambition, they are in almost every type of job, but they are not getting a proper share of management posts in banks, government and so on. This is partly social."

Women might drive their own cars, work in offices, perhaps run a boutique, but this was an Arab masculine world permitting women a few concessions. Many women were still what their mothers and grandmothers had been: child bearing machines and chattels. A new survey confirmed stories I had been told: women with 18 children, men who fathered 24 children by two or three wives.

I met young men and women who were clear about their objectives: one spouse and two children, decently educated and housed. But overall the birthrate was alarming, around 4 per cent per annum. After many years at this pace, it was only just being

recognised that it could not sensibly go on. The Bahrain Family Planning Association was starting to train health workers to go into the community to advise mothers on what a doctor called proper spacing between births.

If Arab women had a hard time, it was likely to be foreigners who would show concern. The American Missionary, Mrs Storm, had denounced the harem. Charles Belgrave had observed that Muslim women were afraid of being cared for by foreigners at childbirth so infant mortality was high. He claimed that often, after a birth, the mother was packed internally with salt to tighten her muscles to enhance her husband's sexual satisfaction, though serious complications might attend a subsequent birth.

In one of his early reports, the chief medical officer, Dr Snow, had described in some detail a range of domestic and toilet articles discovered by doctors in Bahrain women's vaginas. He offered no explanation. When, on my return to Bahrain, I asked an American doctor with long experience whether this practice might have been for gratification, abortion or some other purpose, he replied, "It goes on still."

Another question puzzled me. I had read accounts without number of the cream of the country's manhood sailing away for four months each summer to gather pearls, but nobody ever hinted at what their womenfolk got up to in their absence. I never heard of any woman being stoned to death for infidelity so one had to assume that wives either practised mass celibacy or veiled indiscretion.

The medical doctor had no knowledge of such things, but I bumped into another doctor (of philosophy), an anthropologist named Abdulla Yateem, son of a pearl diver. He too had been curious, so he asked his mother and aunts about their sex lives during the pearling season. His mother's reply was, "The women behaved themselves. We had no choice: there were only old men left!"

That situation disappeared with the end of pearling at the end of the 1950s. Another change was women's attitude to doctors and earlier fears that harm might befall them under anaesthetic. A nurse explained that while some preferred to see a female obstetrician, they now raised no objection if only a male was available.

Old habits die hard. Some men insist on their quota of four wives, though elderly men who boast of nine or so probably include divorced or deceased wives. The newer practice has been employing foreign girls as housemaid-concubines.

The American doctor was scathing about Arab employers who got their maids pregnant and then, because abortion was not officially countenanced in Bahrain, flew the girls to India or rushed them up the motorway to Syria for termination. Younger, educated Arabs looked askance at such goings on. I put it to one young man, "Why don't the women rebel; wives in wealthy families take several men?" He replied, "They do."

I wondered if that was a flippant reply. The subject of women, especially of imported maidservants, was not easily delved into. I asked a hotel receptionist to spare me a little time to talk about her compatriots from the Philippines. Aware of my journalistic background, she raised her hands in objection and said, "No, sir!" The Filipina housemaid was both a real person and a caricature, popularly supposed to be a drudge who toiled from five in the morning till midnight, for a pittance that might exceed a labourer's or a street sweeper's wages or be as little as ten or 15 pounds a week. That was apart from the abuse.

I took what I read in the daily paper to be fact. One, an advert: "Urgently required full time, live in housemaid. Salary 70 dinars". That was a little less than £25 a week.

Two, Bahrain police were investigating the death of a housemaid who hanged herself in her employer's home.

What could be done for young women who, for economic reasons, found themselves in circumstances not unlike slavery?

A man in a government office told me he counselled foreign maids: "Be guided by your head not your heart." That meant, crudely, "Don't give yourself to a man because you think you love him, but sell yourself to the man, the employer, who pays the most."

He added, "In two years here, girls could earn enough money to set up a small business when they go home."

The receptionist at one hotel gave me a warm smile each morning. She was young and very pretty and on a friend's recommendation

had come from Mauritius a few months earlier. I asked her if she liked Bahrain. "I love it," she said.

She sounded so happy, so innocent. I wondered if that innocence would remain unsullied till the end of her two-year stay.

Male domination and exclusivity were obvious. The traditional men's coffee house had no feminine counterpart. And men's associations far outnumbered women's. Among clubs with charitable aims, the Bahrain Round Table provided hospitality which I repaid with an impromptu after dinner speech. Where a score of men were gathered together, a British mass leavened with a few Arabs, drawn from banks and business houses, education, broadcasting, diplomatic service and so on, and where the drink flowed freely and the language and humour were ribald, to put it mildly, this was no place for women.

Another masculine event I was invited to was an informal dinner party. We numbered nine, of middle or advanced years, and the seven Bahrainis apparently met regularly. They were professional men, senior managers in industry or government service, whose tongues loosened under alcoholic influence. Small talk, amusing anecdotes, gossip, the price of shoddy electrical goods in Iran - where Bahrain was seeking trade deals with its enemy of old - were abruptly halted after three hours, at 11pm, when our host suddenly remembered, after anxious prodding from the waiters, that a sumptuous meal was deteriorating on the hob. The food was consumed with indecent haste, then everyone rushed for homegoing cars. Whether the host's wife and daughters were allowed back in the house at this stage, I knew not. I was only sorry that they and other womenfolk were not allowed to be present.

British and American women, especially wives, were frequently incensed by exclusion from social gatherings enjoyed by men. The answer to that was not more women's clubs but agitation for women's rights.

An ingathering of the family had been brought about by the mother island throwing out her arms, or tentacles, to embrace the smaller kin. Pandering, no doubt, to the motor vehicle, several islets were now linked by causeways, as Bahrain was joined to Arabia, so that their idyllic isolation, as Nabbi Saleh's, was no more. The causeway

to Muharraq was long established but its swing bridge section which gave right of way to floating craft had been concreted over. Another new highway ran out to Umm Nasan island, which served as the border control point on the road to Riyadh, the Saudi capital. I made the effort to revisit the twin villages of East and West Rafaa and the important islands of Muharraq and Sitra. In all of them, time had passed by leaving a few familiar marks or maybe an extra scar or two.

The local shaikh's rough wall girt castle still clung to the cliff top over the valley at East Rafaa but a proper road going to West Rafaa was lined with small Indian clothing stores and bank branches. The dominant feature in the West had been the white coated palace visible for miles around but now totally obscured by heavy screens of trees, hedges and shrubs.

Replacing it as a landmark, a new twin-minareted mosque, the Amir's own, was a magnificent piece of architecture. I positioned myself in its acres of floral car parks to take a picture. "Mamnu," hissed a gardener. Forbidden! I took aim with my camera and an armed soldier stepped smartly out of the shadow of the mosque, waving his arms frantically. We walked towards one another. "No picture," said the guard. I had gone to some trouble to get to the mosque and I growled aggressively, "Why not?"

No explanation. The only words he knew were "No picture!" The triumphal turrets in his care might have been secret missiles.

Muharraq needed some pleasant features to impress airborne travellers and motorway monotony was relieved by an artificial waterfall, landscaping and statuary art. New roads skirted the old town, the one time capital, with its ancient houses and winding streets which fed into a maze of alleyways of crude mud-coloured dwellings where passage was made single file.

Behind the weatherworn studded doors and slits for windows, life showed no sign. But who could be sure? The Arabs had been gradually evacuating these decaying structures en route for new towns while, inevitably, a poorer caste took their place, now Indians and Bangladeshis.

Muharraq still had room for the traditional enterprise of building boats by hand. Alongside the snaking coast road, stretches of sand

and coral beach were still strewn with odd lengths of timber and tree trunks. Trade was not brisk, but two Indian - not Arab - heads poked out over the topmost horizontal plank of a tall dhow's hull. The hammering craftsmen from their vantage point had rivals in sight, the ASRY shipyard, owned by a consortium of Gulf governments, managed by a Portuguese company and employing Korean and Filipino labour on repair and maintenance of tankers of 300,000 tons.

Across its causeway, Sitra mirrored Muharraq's mood of dilapidation, though both islands could point to new residential construction, particularly the villas of the moneyed class. Sitra had been, was still to some extent, the heartland of Bahraini industry, providing the site of much of oil operations and a source of Bapco labour. Whenever in the past there was industrial trouble, the finger was usually pointed at Sitra's shia labour. Bapco, shipping and fishing still provided work, but not enough for everybody. And now the populace included Indians, Filipinos and Turks. New industries as they arrived provided more jobs, but then computerisation and other capital intensive innovations reduced the number of jobs.

From a peak of around 8,000, Bapco's workforce had shrunk to roughly a quarter. The company's chief executive elect, the Canadian Brian Waywell, had been brought in to be the hatchet man with the task of slashing the payroll by the year 1995.

A gang of youths in motley European gear, idling away time outside an old mosque at noonday, knew the Bapco score: more computers, more work contracted out, so fewer jobs for locals. "We are all unemployed," said one, "except him." He pointed to a lad spruced up in new brilliantly white Arab costume, who stood shyly on the fringe. "He's got a job in Kuwait; he's on leave."

Sitra, village become sprawling town, wore an air of calculated neglect, clusters of clapped out shanty houses standing out like sores beside pools of undrained water. Dust and grime were everywhere and mud walls had long lost their last coat of whitewash. Tiny boys coming home from school at midday shooed strutting chickens out of living rooms to their rightful place in the sunlit yard. Where narrow streets of crumbling houses appeared abandoned, strips of wood and hardboard over windows were evidence of occupation. At

the rear of a dwelling, in a kind of cowshed, three ragged Arab women sat on their haunches round a pot of stew on a small paraffin burner.

Everyone agreed the housing situation was shocking. Only the Government could handle it by building houses and renting them or selling them on mortgage. Wages were low, living costs high, it was claimed. Local government wages were 200-300 dinars a month. Some manual workers might earn 200 dinars, but many less than 100 a month. And rents were 30 to 120 dinars a month.

In earlier times, the sunni Khalifa regime would have been accused of doing down the shia. It was not suggested now, though religion remained an issue. A young accountant said, "Sitra has 80 per cent shia and 20 per cent sunni. We have one club which is open to all. We have good relations but as friends rather than brothers."

What I saw of Sitra betrayed not a hint of greenery, nor much traffic. A donkey drawing a totter's cart was the only one I saw in Bahrain. Shops were few and in tiny eating houses, seemingly run by poor Indians for poorer Indian labourers, the clientele made an awful mess eating cheap curry dishes with their fingers - washed both before and after - and I did rather better with a spoon.

Apart from the dusty open air market selling fruit and veg and fresh fish, Sitra boasted a Co-op retail shop. Apparently a number existed in Bahrain and liberals and religious fundamentalists keenly fought democratic elections for Co-op committee places.

What Bahrain needed now, it seemed to me, was strong local government. The population was expanding, as were towns new and old, and there was plenty of scope for expanding services, given resources and will. Yet central Government had stripped the municipalities of their powers, reducing them almost to the status of parish councils in England. Such councils as existed were appointed not elected.

It was disconcerting to hear wholehearted approval for the system from the director general of the Manama municipality, a thoughtful man in his forties. For one thing, he said, democracy was a good dream but impractical here and now. The election of the national assembly had revealed the divisions in society. It did not work. People were not ready for it yet, he believed. Government

ministries, rightly in his view, had taken over water, power, transport, fire brigade (now part of the security services), public health and planning, leaving municipal authorities with street cleaning, emptying septic tanks and licensing markets. The local authority raised about 60 per cent of its budget from a 10 per cent tax on rented residential and commercial property and received 40 per cent from the state.

Bahrain was a quiet place today, not like the 1950s when outsiders caused trouble, the likes of Egypt and Al Bakr, and later Egypt and the Soviet Union. The municipality worked well with appointed, not elected, members. What, said the Manama director, would be the point of electing people who were illiterate?

Whatever else had changed over the last four decades, the arguments had not moved an inch. Belgrave said it: the people are not ready for democracy. I asked a Bahraini not long out of an English university to comment. He said, "So what if elected councillors are illiterate. They can still do a good job."

It was remiss of me not to ask those who used the word "illiterate" (and its polar opposite "wise") to define it. Both expressions, bandied about unstintingly in 1991 as in 1951, may have meant other than as defined in an English dictionary. To belong to a mercantile dynasty carried aristocratic distinction, wisdom, goodness and the fitness for office of an educated elite. The other sort of people were parvenus, unmoneyed, evil, given to ideas above their station, stupid, ignorant. In a word, illiterate.

The education ministry had a formula for illiteracy and a plan to eradicate it by the year 2000. The literacy rate was imprecisely known: over 80 per cent for males and rather less for females was the official guesstimate. Foreign nationals would of course have higher rates. Nobody would expect to eliminate illiteracy totally in any society, but Bahrain appeared to have a particular problem in lacking a literary heritage. If literacy meant being able to read an electricity bill or write out a shopping list, the official objective was realistic.

Educational advances over two or three generations were impressive. Primitive people were handling the latest marvels in industry and commerce, understanding the jargon of text books.

Sons of fishermen, pot makers and pearl divers and daughters of untutored mothers had academic degrees. Firms seeking office staff advertised for "graduates only."

The industrial culture was literate. But what lay beyond? The literacy that allows for creative thinking, exchanging ideas and simply enjoying reading was not everywhere apparent. Newspapers were not widely read. The banalities of local radio and TV were no substitute. Public libraries, for all that the director claimed they were well stocked with 75,000 Arabic and 25,000 English books, struck me as impoverished, the English books shelved in corridors consisting mainly of political and economic works of the 1930s (perhaps a job lot from Charing Cross Road) and pot boiler novels of the kind discarded by Boots the Chemists when they closed their lending libraries ages ago.

Bahrain's need, if I was not mistaken, was a good solid foundation. And that implied more than splendid architecture. The Gulf University near Awali, funded by seven states and five years old, was a masterpiece of polished marble and glass, approached through an avenue of trees and massed flowers and foliage. Delicate touches like watercourses and an amphitheatre were set in marble.

For students unable to gain places at British and Indian universities and polytechnics, the Gulf University must have seemed a desirable seat of learning. But an Englishwoman teaching English was not impressed with students: more like lower secondary pupils. Perhaps she had an axe to grind (dissatisfied with five dinars an hour for teaching) when she said that sunnis and shias found it hard to mix, many were pro-Iraqi, and all her students turned their backs when the Amir paid a courtesy visit.

At this time the very existence of the university was threatened as the funding governments held crisis talks over legal action taken by the building contractors who claimed they were owed nearly 25 million dinars.

A survey of elderly Bahrainis indicated a very high rate of illiteracy. Admittedly, many had not had the opportunity of schooling. Yet it was possible that some had been to school, had learned to read and write and let the facility lapse through lack of

stimulus and literature. So, 2000 AD might not be education's millenium.

'Health for All 2000' was another United Nations goal or slogan adopted by the Government. Priorities implicit in this differ by country but it is recognised that the key determinant in health standards is poverty, or its elimination. If the pace of progress of the previous 40 years continued, Bahrain's health services would cope by the end of the century. But that would also depend on education relating to hygiene and family planning, saying No to the Anglo-American tobacco barons' assault on developing countries, observing sensible dietary regimes and so on.

I called in at Manama's main general hospital, Sulmaniya, on the morning the rains came. I could see now why kerbs everywhere were so treacherously steep for pavement traffic. They were to trap storm water in the absence of drainage. The roads were many inches under water and the hospital virtually an island in its flooded grounds. Motorised patients and visitors ploughed on; those on foot removed their shoes and waded.

Inside the hospital, the reception and inquiry desks were staffed by men. The women were in charge. Unannounced, I wandered into the chief executive's office. She looked up from her paperwork, curious at my intrusion. I said I had walked into the matron's office many years ago and was given a grand tour.

"Not now," said the boss. It would have to be planned. I acknowledged that. She said I could go over the hospital by myself so long as I did not enter the wards.

One modern hospital is much like another. Sulmaniya, on six floors, was full of anxious people wandering through long corridors to join queues in treatment rooms and outpatient clinics. A young Arab father departed, gingerly holding a new babe almost at arm's length in front of him, while his veiled wife trailed behind with an older boy. Departments handled most severe maladies. Patients with cancer, Bahrain's second biggest killer, had to go to Saudi Arabia for radiotherapy. Sulmaniya could have a chemo-therapy unit if the public stumped up two-million dinars, it was reported.

A recent survey of 800 people over 60 had revealed substantial arthritis, eye disease and hypertension. About 40 per cent had

hearing problems and 80 per cent visual deficiencies. Only 23 per cent of the sample actually went shopping and a mere 18 per cent travelled farther than walking distance. Stress among family members and carers could result in "elder abuse."

A geriatric hospital in Muharraq had to admit people between the ages of 51 and 94 with disabilities because nobody could or would look after them at home. Elderly women were especially prone to psychiatric disorders, the report noted. Surprising in a polygamous society? Participation in social activities was minimal. An old people's association claimed the elderly should be given the chance to work and the health ministry's planning director urged raising of the retirement age to beyond 60.

Families needed financial incentives to care for their elderly and sheltered accommodation should be provided, the survey argued. The voluntary welfare sector, less advanced than in developed countries, faced many difficulties in supporting the aged, infirm, disabled, and blind children and others, not least through shortage of money. A number of expatriate men's and women's associations, Rotary, Lions and others familiar in Britain and the US, staged various fund raising events.

The oldest medical institution, the American Mission Hospital, was still going strong, rebuilt in Manama on a grander scale, providing a fee-paying service and much favoured by Arabs and Indians.

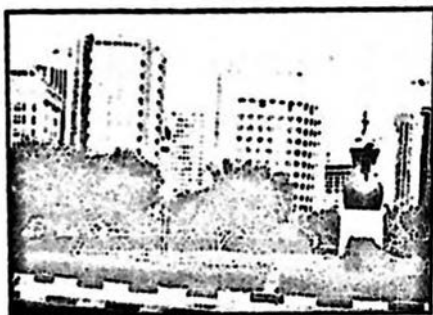
The American doctors were of two kinds, secular and missionary, one paid the rate for the job, the other employed on a charitable basis. Whereas the Muscat and Kuwait governments had closed or absorbed their mission hospitals, Bahrain's at the express wish of the Amir remained. It was regarded as a shrewd move, a contribution to a private enterprise culture which overseas investors would find attractive.

A cynical view was of a form of insurance based on the precedent of Grenada. A whiff of trouble or revolt and the Amir could count on the prompt arrival of the US Marines "to protect American lives."

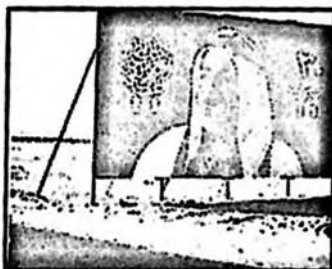
The Government, aware of Britain's poll tax experience - avoid registration to dodge paying tax - decided to sweeten a pill by

turning the 1991 national census into a national lottery. The head count once each decade had always been treated with suspicion, even though it had good points. In 1941, registering meant qualifying for a wartime ration card. Conversely, discovery by census could land illegal migrant workers with a deportation order.

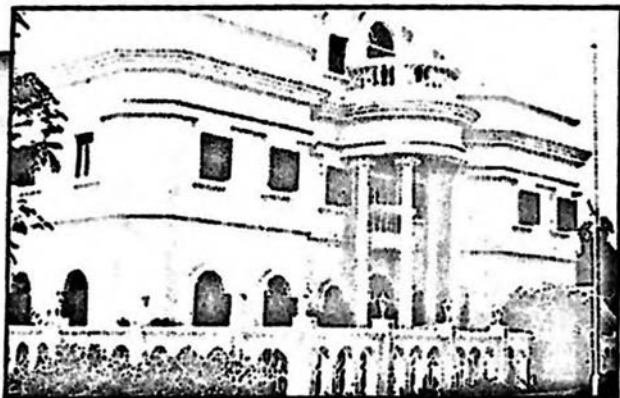
Form-filling in November and December 1991 meant mustering 1,200 officials to comb the named highways and nameless byways and to devote 20 minutes to quizzing each head of household in a half-million population. And to induce participation, a glittering array of prizes was offered. Each day, randomly selecting from the newly interviewed, the computer awarded gold watches, cookers, fridges, videos and all manner of goodies, including 100-dinar cash prizes. Meritorious service - such as chaining up the vicious family pet in the enumerator's presence - resulted in a daily bonus, a high-life week in Hong Kong or a washing machine, for the most co-operative head of household, one male, one female.



BAHRAIN 1990s
Elegant examples of modern office blocks, desirable residences and stylish mosques, ventures

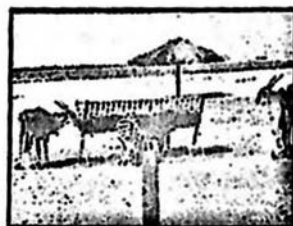


in Hi Tech industry, heritage, conservation and tourism characterise progress during the Amir's rule. In 1991, his 30th anniversary, hoardings declare, 'God save the Amir and the nation'.



Left: Godaybia Mosque.

Below: Areen Wildlife Park.





MUHARRAQ 1990s

Traditional boatbuilding
and slum alleys linger
but sewers are laid in
main street.



MODERN MANAMA

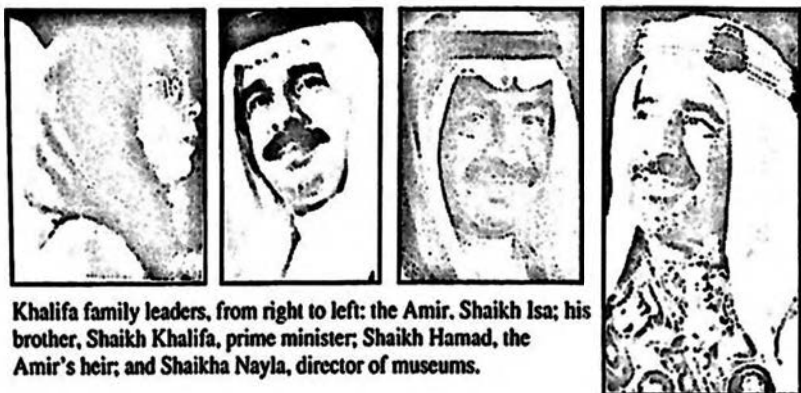


LEFT: Old look
narrow alleyway.



RIGHT: New
style guardians
of law and
order.





Khalifa family leaders, from right to left: the Amir, Shaikh Isa; his brother, Shaikh Khalifa, prime minister; Shaikh Hamad, the Amir's heir; and Shaikha Nayla, director of museums.



Left: Yusuf Shirawi, minister for industry,

and

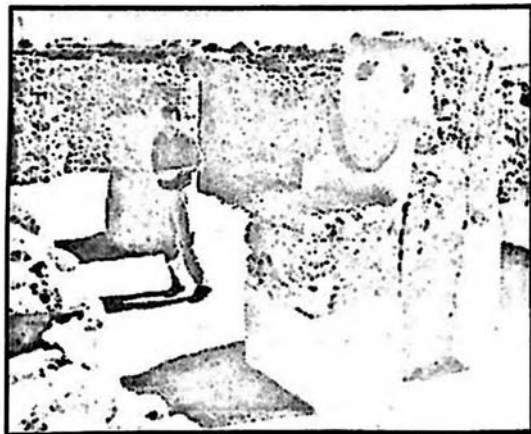
Ahmed Kanoo, tycoon



Sir Harold Walker (left), former British Ambassador to Bahrain, and Gen. Sir Peter de la Billiere, British commander in Gulf War.

Dr. Robert Killick, excavation director, in unearthed temple (circa 2000 BC) at Saar.

Below: Basketmaker



CAN LIGHTNING strike in the same place twice, and history repeat itself? Yes, yes. The photo saga makes the point. Way back, the Awali schoolteacher had given me the run around to cheat me of my scenes of India. Now others had the same ambition.

I had at least 500 black and white pictures of Bahrain. Technically, they were not brilliant, but they told a story, many stories. Each was a faithful witness to Bahrain that was, depicting scenes - the fire tragedy - and native craftsmanship, market days, donkeys drawing water, mosques, swimming galas, Shaikhs Sulman and Abdullah and Rupert Hay in their finery, and Belgrave, Brown, Skinner and other characters in their workaday wear.

The Bapco 'Weekend News' reported: "Mr Mapp is giving his significant collection of photographs and old publications to the Bapco archives and the Bahrain National Museum."

But others wanted a slice of the action too; to handle the prints and copy them. Bapco PR man Sam Knight remonstrated with me. "Each time you lend them they become devalued," he said.

Big Jim, the American engineer, took it further. "Heck, you don't just give pictures away, you sell them," he said, reminding me that he earned 15,000 dollars a year freelancing.

Sam and Jim had business acumen but they were missing the point. I didn't have a Rembrandt that is stuck in a vault, away from public gaze, and gloated over as an appreciating but unappreciated asset. I wanted my photos to go on show, gratis, not exploited for someone's profit.

When the Gulf Daily News used a selection of my pictures, I rightly guessed that their promise to return them would prove false. I was unconcerned, being grateful for the publicity.

Al Ayam was another matter. The two journalists who called on me at the Bristol Hotel soon after my arrival borrowed my photos of the late ruler and his sons and promised to return them. One

presented a card marked Jalal Al Mubarak, Editor, and the other said he was Hisham Adwan, a Bahrain-born Palestinian.

I seized the opportunity to say I assumed they had political contacts and I hoped they would introduce me, particularly to Arab radicals. Sure, they replied. They would be delighted to arrange it. Adwan said, "Tomorrow we will come back here, the hotel, in the afternoon, two o'clock. I will drive you to the beach at Zellaq and then take you on a tour, and meet interesting people."

"Fine," I said. "Two o'clock, here."

"Two o'clock," he repeated. "Insha'llah!"

I countered, "No, not insha'llah. Definitely. I'll be here waiting for you."

Adwan, slim, swarthy, in mid-twenties, forced a smile. "I shall be here at two, with my car...Insha'llah."

Time was when Insha'llah, like DV, meant that an act of God alone could thwart some pledged event. Now it could be debased to mean perhaps. I waited in all afternoon. No Palestinian.

A couple of days later the pair showed up, offering no explanation or apology for the failed appointment, and said they wanted to borrow all my prints, seven or eight boxes, to put through an electronic scanner which could copy them all in a few hours. I was curious to know the purpose. "We want to make a montage," said Adwan.

I assumed this meant making up a page or two of pictures in some artistic design. I was prepared to release them because I had all the negatives, as I told the men. But I also made it clear I wanted the prints returned as soon as possible.

It would be wearying to recount the lengths I went to in trying to retrieve my pictures, the absences when I phoned the paper's offices, the promises of meetings which never took place. It transpired that the man with the card marked editor was a teacher who did casual press work, one of a number of so called editors.

With my departure near, I visited Al Ayam. Hisham Adwan rose from his chair in the reporters' room, offered a handshake and a smile and sent out for coffee. "My photos," I said. "I want them."

"Yes, yes," he said. "But first come and see the building and meet the managers." When we returned to his room, I said, "Now, where's my pictures?"

Evading my question, he said, "What about the negatives?"

"What do you mean, what about the negatives?"

"You said we could borrow them."

Irritated, I replied, "I told you no such thing. I told you that all the negatives were to go to Bapco after the museum had looked at them. I was lending you the prints, that's all. And I want them back now."

The other reporters, men and women, pricked up their ears at the urgency in my tone. Adwan said he would have to gather the prints together from various offices. He would bring them to my hotel, the Palace Inn, just round the corner, that evening.

I waited in. He did not come. Next morning, five minutes after the offices opened, I strode into the reporters' room. The Palestinian got up, smiled and put out a hand. "Forget that," I said, sharply. "I've come for my photos."

He tried to widen his smile, more arrogantly than nervously. I gave him no chance to speak but rattled on, my voice rising. "I'm serious now. You've messed me about too long. You've got a choice, give me the photos or I fetch the police." Three other reporters heard me and hurried out of the room.

Adwan spoke. "Do you want tea or coffee?" He was grinning.

"Nothing, just my pictures. You're a thief."

He shook his head. "I am your friend, not a thief."

"But you are. You have my pictures. I've asked for them back. You refuse to hand them over. That is stealing. That's why I'm going for the police."

Now he realised I was serious. "Do you want to sell them?"

That was interesting. It had never come up before. It made me more certain that the paper, or Adwan, aimed to keep the prints for gain, perhaps to sell copies,

I said, "I don't want to sell them. I want them back. You've got five minutes or I get the police."

He sent out for coffee which I refused to touch. We went into a corridor and I made sure everyone heard my references to police. Bashmi, the executive, came out to investigate the commotion and

ordered my tormentor to get the photos. Adwan turned to me. "Why do you want to call the police when I give them back to you?"

"When?" I said. "Now," he replied.

"Let's get them," I told him.

I was shunted around various offices and invited to take a seat and wait for my pictures to be assembled somewhere. I would have had to concede that my anger so far had a synthetic element in it, for I expected threats rather than recourse to the law to produce the goods. But I was determined not to leave empty handed.

Adwan left me, then returned. "Where are they?" I demanded.

"Locked in a drawer. The scanner operator has the key and is not on duty now. He will be in later."

Angrily, I retorted, "Don't make a fool of me. Stop playing games. Send for the key!"

The lad who worked the scanning machine was summoned, maybe hauled out of bed. When he arrived he unlocked a drawer and extracted a dozen photos, all he had put through the scanner so far. Where were the rest of the 500? Adwan disappeared and brought back several of my boxes. "This is everything," he said.

"Oh no it's not. Where's the Voice of Bahrain?"

I had given him a copy of the magazine to translate an interview that Al Bakr had with Skinner and Brown in 1952. I demanded the publication. "It's in my flat in Rafaa," said the Palestinian.

"Well, you'd better go and get it then, hadn't you."

He thought I was being troublesome, making mountains out of molehills. Everything would be returned to me, he promised; never mind that I would be away from Bahrain next day. It would take 15 minutes to get to Rafaa and back, he said. I knew it would take much longer, but I insisted that he go.

He handed over the magazine on his return. "That's all."

"I don't think so. More pictures," I said.

He didn't quibble, opened a drawer in his desk and took out an old Kodak box. Full of pictures. Mine.

"No more," he said. He paused. "When you go to the airport tomorrow, I will take you in my car. What time do you leave?"

The damned cheek of the fellow. "Never you mind," I said curtly. "I have transport."

His smile had returned and his composure, not that he had ever really been put out during this long farce. He held out a hand. I responded without enthusiasm and said, "Pity it had to end like this, but you let me down badly. I thought you were a friend, promising to take me to see people. Where are they?"

Unrepentant, not lost for words, he exclaimed, "We found Amer for you."

"No you didn't. I concede you mentioned him in the paper and I thank you for that. But a Bapco man tracked him down, not you. If you had played fair with me, you would have got these prints for good," and with that parting shot I left.

I took the pictures back to the hotel and tipped the boxes out on my bed. I felt sure some were missing, but I was not concerned. I had scored something of a victory, though I knew not what to do with the spoils.

The journalist had landed me - and himself - in an absurd situation. When he originally borrowed the prints, I had expected to give them later to Bapco, but Knight said they only wanted negatives, not prints. I met a chap doing a bit of freelancing who was anxious to get his grubby fingers on the pictures to turn to a profit and I ruled him out. I could easily have told Al Ayam to keep the pictures because I had no use for them. But principle and honour were at stake. Their man had consistently lied to me - just like the teacher in Awali - and to have given in would show that dishonesty pays. That was why I demanded their return.

Sifting through them, I made up a little package of photos I thought Amer would like, including one where we sat on the pearling boat together. The rest I parcelled up and took to the British Club, for collection by a woman from the Embassy who would take them to Awali, remove any that took her fancy and hand the remainder to Bapco, whether they wanted them or not.

That, I told myself, was the end of the picture saga, the trauma, the arguments over who gets what and why. All that bother when all I wanted to do was to get rid of my old pictures.

Back at the hotel after despatching the parcel, I received an instruction to phone Amer. He asked if I was flying home next day and I said I was. Then, "Listen, Mapp, I got the prints from the

studio. Very good. I took them to His Highness and he was very pleased with them. I gave him all three sets and now I haven't got a set for myself. You have the negatives. I would like them to make another set of prints."

I said, "I haven't got them."

"But you must have. My driver brought them to you on Sunday."

"He did not," I said. "I thought he must have given them to you. I'll bet I know what's happened. The studio has kept the negatives. Everybody's after them."

I told Amer briefly about my encounter at Al Ayam that morning, of my threat to fetch the police. "That's what you must do," I told him. "Tell the photo studio right away that you want the negatives immediately or you will call the police. You understand?"

Amer said he understood. He further understood that eventually he should send the negatives to Bapco for safe keeping in their archives. I was certain they would never reach the archives, but by now I was past caring.

ON MY last day, I rose early, less than refreshed. At least I had slept undisturbed. Not like the night before: another fracas in the small hours after the music stopped and the bars closed. The action was in the car park under my first floor window. A horde of Arabs made a mess of restraining two principal protagonists who darted about, shaking fists and hurling insults. This time there was no singing, just sound and fury. It subsided and the echoing din of slammed car doors and rapid acceleration sounded the All Clear.

It dawned on me that I was jaded, played out. I was genuinely footsore and a blister on my right big toe reduced me to a limp. After a month, novelty and incredulity had faded and each day now meant tramping over the same terrain. Knowing that this was the last day was a relief, yet I wished I could have advanced the clock 12 hours, nearer the deadline of well past midnight when my flight was due.

For breakfast, I finished my food cache, bread and butter, marmalade and a banana and made several cups of coffee. Wogan was on the Telly, so I switched it off. It was a strange business, this BBC World Service TV. Everybody - the Brits - said how marvellous it was and how it knocked American CNN, of Baghdad fame, into a cocked hat (which was not true!) and how they could hardly wait for January 1992 when the BBC would screen 24 hours a day in Bahrain. Poor, misguided expatriate souls. News items apart, the stuff they were fed was rubbish! It was Wogan and Kilroy and sports quizzes and game shows, some repeated two or three times in one day. By coincidence they were all programmes that I never, never watched at home.

I carefully packed my bags, filling with a stack of Government annual reports and local newspapers the space vacated by my photos and papers. The presentation coffee pot had to be squeezed in too, which meant discarding its handsome red upholstered case.

After depositing my luggage in reception, I hobbled from the Palace Inn and caught the bus to town for the last time. I meandered through the bazaar, whose crowded alleyways I now knew intimately, seeking a few souvenirs crafted nearer Bahrain than the People's Republic of China and looking for picturesque views on which to squander the last frames in my camera.

Being Thursday, most people had the afternoon free, I supposed, and after the shops closed around noon, traffic just melted away. Hardly a soul stirred in the thriving metropolis of Manama. I had miles of highway and seafront promenade almost to myself, along with hours of boredom.

The promenade of thirsty gardens and ornamental sea wall, and the huddle of huge hotels and office blocks which, from Muharraq over the water looked like the skyscrapered tip of Manhattan, had come into being after the sea was pushed back hundreds of yards. Deep below the new sea wall, studded concrete revetments and massive boulders made it plain that never again would townsfolk wade out to perform dawn ablutions nor foreign foe or illegal immigrants steal ashore through the shallows.

I chose a bench to rest weary limbs and allow my thoughts to wander. To wander and wonder whether this long trip had been worthwhile. I felt I had seen too little, gained no deep insights or profound impressions. Certainly I had met too few people willing to engage in meaningful dialogue. A youngish Arab don at the university, who had gained his doctorate at Edinburgh, complained about expatriate Brits being insular and unwelcoming. I might have told him it cut both ways.

Introversion tightens its grip inexorably. "We don't bother the neighbours and they don't bother us" has become universal. The Bapco wife from England, 30 years in Awali, said, "We go months without going into Manama, the traffic's terrible. Awali is quiet. We have everything we need, so there's no need to go outside. People live their own lives."

Bachelor Foxall, the oldest inhabitant, while admitting "Perhaps we are getting older," considered that "The community spirit has gone."

Really, with such an array of sport and leisure pursuits to choose from? Bapco's twice-weekly news sheet listed them: Keep Fit, Scottish country dancing, sailing, community sewing groups, chess and popular games. Perhaps things were becoming formalised. In the old days, everything was amateur, done for love. Now the golf club boasted a professional, the riding club had a professional instructor, while a paid expert coached karate.

Of course, Awali had changed, despite the claim that it had been caught in a time warp. The Anglo-Americans who formed the original colony had shrunk to a few hundreds in a multi-racial settlement approaching 3,000.

What might have passed for community spirit was the special Friday lunch in the Bapco Club where for four dinars (£6) one could eat as much of any number of dishes as one fancied, from roast beef and Yorkshire pudding to curries and fish and a surfeit of luscious desserts. Bapco's chief executive, Don Hepburn, his successor and a PR man, with their wives, were accorded no special favours or recognition as we served ourselves in the crowded banqueting hall. In convivial mood, foursomes or parties of 20 around circular tables represented divers nationalities, though none mixed.

Doubtless the spirit of Christmas and New Year would encourage togetherness. Festivities were planned, but the New Year's Eve Grand Ball at the club (7pm till 2am) was for couples; loners banned. Bahrain's National Day, marking anniversaries of both the declaration of independence and the Amir's accession with a carnival and fireworks, was December 16, close enough to Christmas and New Year to allow for the masses of decorations and fairy light put up for one to stay for the others.

Of the 26 hotels in the country, Manama's swell hotels, in or out of international chains, were not designed for the package holiday trade but the expense-account foreign business brigade. They were hives of commercial and social industry, accommodating high powered conferences and mediocre floor shows, the regular meetings of societies concerned with natural history, animal welfare and good causes, an occasional London play with a strong West End cast (tickets 20 dinars) or a 50-dinar dinner with a famed Egyptian belly dancer thrown in. I savoured the free diversions. A powerful

piano performance by a US ambassador of music, boyish looking Chinese-American Prof. Hao Huang, of classical music and high-plane jazz was compelling, yet half the large non-Arab audience vanished at the interval.

A tinier audience heard three local engineers debunk the gloomy prognoses made by distant observers of the postwar scene. Estimates of war damage had been exaggerated in some respects, they argued. Much of the structural damage in Kuwait City was superficial. Health and the Gulf ecology were unlikely to suffer long term effects. As to the drop in Bahrain's summer temperatures to the lowest this century, this was not the result of smoke from Kuwait's burning oil wells eclipsing the sun.

The use of English in commercial or social intercourse was so common that one wondered whether Arabs were taught Arabic in their schools as a second or foreign language. Britishers in the old days used to make a fetish of employing Arabic for felicitations: good morning, how are you?, please and thanks; sabaah al khair, kaif haalak?, min fadlak and ashkurak. Not any more, it seemed. An Englishman complained about an informal gathering we attended where the Arabs present occasionally lapsed into Arabic amongst themselves. He thought it was a bad show. They spoke perfect English, so why leave us out of the conversation? I felt like telling him to learn Arabic if he was so concerned.

When I inquired after the linguist Bill Mawdsley, people said they never saw the going of him. But young Ballantyne stayed on for many years, became an Arabist too. Fancy that!

Effusive politeness and handshaking marked the most casual of meetings in modern Bahrain. Courtesy could be tiresome. On the other hand, entering a bank or a shop it was practice to let the door slam in the face of the person behind. And the foreign visitor could be sure of a welcome from the local branch of the international brotherhood of highwaymen, the pirate bus operators and taxi drivers ever demanding more than their due.

Others on the road who flouted the law were motorists who were careless about their alcohol intake. I had been told in London that failing a breath test on Bahrain's roads incurred instant disqualification and an enormous on the spot fine, 2,000 pounds or

dinars or something. No arguments! Then I met a Londoner in a quiet club outside Manama who had clearly had a skinful, eyes glazed and speech slurred, as they say in court. It was dark, around seven o'clock, and the drinker's ten-year-old daughter anxiously tugged at his sleeve. "Come on, Dad. Mum's waiting for us."

As he downed another one for the road, I said, "You're not driving home, are you?"

"Sure, not far. Not much traffic at this time." He swayed and jingled his car keys, cockily. He had given me a lighthearted summary of three confinements in police cells, two for driving while drunk (once demolishing a tree) and the third time for making rude signs to a senior security officer who was trying to overtake him. It had been an expensive business, but he still had a licence to drink and drive. He had, coincidentally, a good job in the aluminium smelter.

While foreign workers helped to keep industry profitable, their faults could be discounted. In any case, alcohol might be construed as the core of Bahrain's vaunted "liberal laws and relaxed lifestyle," as the Government's lavishly worded literature put it.

Tourism, the Government hoped, would provide an economic lifeline. Never mind that tourism reeks of "taking in each other's washing," each state bidding for customers by nourishing its theme parks, Disneylands, zoos, exotic nightlife, sunshine and water sports. When a vast, empty island such as Australia earns more from tourism than from wool and bauxite, others sit up. But countries offering breathtaking views and exciting spectacles have a head start.

The heritage trail is all the rage. "Here's how it was a century ago - the mines, the cottages and cobbled streets, the spinning wheels and the little general stores." But once you've seen one, or half a dozen, they tend to pall.

The oil industry bequeaths few relics, the burial mounds and the Portuguese fort are historical monuments but only fleeting attractions, and pearling as an entertainment has not caught on. Bahrain had more atmosphere when dirt, mud walls and flies belonged to the natural order. Wine, women and song, a whiff of the Arabian Nights, give Bahrain potential for Playground of the Gulf.

The authorities' attempts since 1985 to make the country presentable to tourists have been commendable. A few small public parks, empty whenever I visited them, were pleasant green oases in built up areas. One had a scenic railway which snaked over an artificial lake and bird sanctuary. It also quartered large exotic birds in aviaries.

Having scattered through urbanisation such wild life as existed, the Government established a safari park where travellers and animals could take stock of each another. The new Areen park near the first oil wells in the lower part of the island measured eight square kilometres of parched desert, half off limits and used for the breeding of endangered species. The public half was shared by groups of native oryx and gazelle, and small herds of horned beasts, ostriches, zebra, bustards, wildebeest and a pair of black swans, mainly imported from Africa and Asia. As they sought the comfort of a modicum of shade and pond water, the creatures grouped in species were clearly visible. Whether they will be so easily seen when the 70,000 saplings, thorns, acacias and feeding grasses take root and flourish, the next century will tell.

Tourism looked a doubtful stimulus to prosperity in a future of uncertainty. Oil had for 60 years been a life support system that could be easily switched off by Saudi Arabia or threatened by surplus refining capacity elsewhere. Industrial and manufacturing diversity later introduced could conceivably be more economically undertaken by the emergent Asian and Pacific nations.

Deprived of foreign investment and the inventiveness, expertise and muscle power of expatriate labour, Bahrain might find itself too small and too weak to sustain a viable economy and reverting to antiquity. The Government was not speaking in such apocalyptic terms; on the contrary, optimistic noises were made. Yet it was clear that economic activity was entering a new phase and somewhere in it was tourism.

I saw a lot of the Amir, pictorially. If he was as knowing as claimed, he would have seen my picture in various publications. But we never met in the flesh. Something must have gone awry, for it was generally assumed that destiny would bring us together. One of the earliest remarks to me was, "I suppose you'll be seeing His

Highness." A week later: "Will you be seeing His Highness?" This became, "Have you seen him?" and "When will you see him?" and finally, "Has His Highness called you to the palace yet?"

Everyone, it seemed, had met the Amir at some time, formally or informally. He was friendly and jolly and liked jokes, etc. etc. and he liked to see people, especially foreign visitors. He also liked to be known as Happy Jack, I was informed. Finding intermediaries to secure an introduction to him was easy, people said. But he did not summon me and I did not approach him.

So I never got the chance to put the questions I had prepared, starting with the ones that Belgrave had not answered: What plans are there for introducing democracy? Is 'feudal' a fair description of Khalifa Bahrain? How much does the ruling family take out of the national exchequer? What goes on at the weekly meetings of the Cabinet?

Why was it necessary to have all these security men all over the place, these men in olive green that I took to be foreign mercenaries, the small, lean other ranks with pencil moustaches and the sergeants with pot bellies?

I was curious to learn something of the Amir's vast family, the rich and powerful members and hangers on. Were any poor? All Khalifa males were entitled to the prefix Shaikh and the only two women identified in public were addressed Shaikha. Shaikh (tribal chief or religious leader) reinforced the family name, Khalifa (caliph, ruler, successor to the Prophet), but it seemed excessive calling the hordes of tiny Khalifa boys shaikh, which properly belongs to an old man. The Khalifas maintained a low profile. The princes and princelings (and the odd princess) in the Kuwaiti and Saudi ruling dynasties might have their peccadilloes aired in the foreign public prints from time to time, but I never heard of a Khalifa stepping out of line.

The family was not a subject for public tittle tattle or speculation. A disaffected civil servant put it succinctly: "The people hate the Khalifas and treat them with contempt."

He took me on a car tour of stately homes in and out of town, the villas or palaces set in estates bounded by ornamental stone walls, hundreds of yards long and high enough to frustrate any Peeping Tom. The rooftops were visible from outside, not so the swimming

pools and landscaping. "Shaikhs and rich merchants own these," said my guide. "You would like to know what happens behind those walls?" It was a rhetorical question without elaboration.

Between the people who "hate the Khalifas" and the people who "love the Khalifas" there were, one sensed, a great majority who were indifferent or not prepared to question a system that offered a quiet life. How could one gauge the feelings of the public, the citizen masses and the non-citizen masses, in the absence of opinion polls, public meetings, political parties, manifestoes and elections? No graffiti defaced or enlivened blank walls, no KHALIFA RULE OK or its antithesis. Dissidents stayed underground, while informers - an Englishman said one belonged to his club - kept an eye on suspects.

As single-party systems make way for pluralism around the globe, one is bound to ask whether the Arab world in general and the Gulf states in particular can continue to enjoy the luxury of operating outside the mainstream; whether "monarchies" (kings, princes and shaikhs) can hold on to the reins of government, citing custom as their mandate. Or are the states too small to practise popular, elected government?

The Khalifas, to me, remained a mystery, as elusive and impenetrable as, say, the Mafia. But where I had occasion to see members of the family in public offices they appeared to be pursuing their duties conscientiously. Who could say whether their privileges, for some at least, were a burden; that they were only clinging to power until a better alternative could be found, and in the meantime they would watch what the democracies did and correct their mistakes?

The dynasty had been born to rule Bahrain since Shaikh Ahmed seized control in 1783. Two centuries. Would it last till the end of time or until the oil ran out?

Spots of rain interrupted my reverie. The sky had turned leaden, a breeze came off the sea. The change had come after a month of almost unbroken sunshine and temperatures in the 80s. Tonight there would be no glorious sunset. Odd, during two years in Awali I never once wrote about the sun going down. It needed an ambience, such as only Manama could provide. As daybreak began with faint

light creeping across the sky to explode into sunrays, so sunset slowly and serenely ushered in the night by transmuting blue sky with orange then purple glow, bathing white or dun walls in changing colour until a velvety darkness settled on the silhouettes of jumbled rows of squat mosques and flat roofed dwellings.

I left my bench to proceed along the sea road, deserted but for three white robed Arabs leaning on the wall and gazing over the water. "Hi! Are you English?" the youngest called as I passed. I stopped. The speaker was a youth in his teens. He said they had come from Saudi Arabia for the afternoon. I said I had been this way 40 years earlier.

The youth said he was studying English literature at university. Was that my scene? Not really, I replied. I was more interested in politics but frustrated because people seemed reluctant to talk.

He said, "They are frightened?" It was more statement than question.

He asked what I thought of Bahrain today. "It's still Third World with a coating of candy floss," I answered.

The youth shook his head. He said, "No, not third world. Fourth...Bahrain, Saudi, the Gulf."

His older companions flashed him cautionary glances, ending conversation. We said goodbye.

I hobbled along the coastal highway. Spots splashed on the serried ranks of temporary hoardings depicting His Highness in varied moods, austere to near chuckling, and I expected in time rivulets would run down his cheeks like tears. The rain grew more insistent as I reached the huge modern mosque standing in isolation by the shore, an extravagant yellow building featuring both minarets and dome and aptly named Grand Mosque. I gave it an appreciative eye while taking shelter within and, being obliged to remove my footwear, benefiting from applying the soles of my aching feet to the cool stone floor.

The rain soon stopped. I crossed the highway, then crossed Shaikh Isa Avenue to unfamiliar territory, an apparent British enclave centred on towering Mansouri Mansions. A shopping parade included many small restaurants, Indian, Chinese, and a humble Korean place in which I had an unappetising stew and wished I had

'waited for Maggie's Fish Bar, across the street, to open. A couple of larger stores were stocked up with Christmas tackle, cards, wrapping paper, toys, candles and quasi religious objects, and a little supermarket boasted on an entrance sign that it supplied the following "traditional Christmas specialities: Partridge, Pheasant, Grouse and Roast Boar." In tins, most likely.

Rejoining Shaikh Isa Avenue, in its last section leading to Palace Inn Hotel a dual carriageway barely touched by developers, I passed the little fee-paying Naim School (established 1981), displaying its motto: "Every child is our precious treasure."

I collected my bags from the hotel and took a taxi to the airport. It was a damp, dark, dismal night. The prospect of waiting five or six hours for my flight was not inviting, but there was nowhere else I wanted to be. The departure waiting hall was crowded with travellers and friends, dressed in all the costumes of east and west, milling round, bound for Bombay, Bangkok, London and all points of the compass.

Seated in an inconspicuous corner, I noticed a small knot of Indians looking in my direction. One who had been pointing came over to me, took a hard look and said, "Yes, it is you." He smiled. "We saw you on television this evening."

So it was this Thursday at 7.30. My interview was screened after all. I said I supposed it was only a couple of minutes and he said No, it was quite long. The important question : "Was it any good?" "It was OK," he replied. I wasn't sure whether he said it was quite interesting.

We smiled and shook hands. He returned to his Indian friends and confirmed I was the one. All nodded sagely, waved to me and then went on their way. The Englishwoman who checked the flight tickets said, "Saw you on TV tonight, Mr Mapp."

So that was it: my flash of fame on the point of departure. A Grand Finale! Let the curtain come down! And I missed it.

BY INVITATION I joined an old boys' association, the Bahrain Society in London, lifting membership to around 330, largely aging British but including Arabs. Three or four meetings a year usually attracted 40 or 50 to savour a clubby atmosphere of wine and titbits before listening to a Brit describe his experiences in Bahrain. Taking a rosy view of Bahrain life was encouraged, contrary to reports circulated by Amnesty International alleging arrest, unfair trial and torture of hundreds of dissidents.

BBC Television, during Prisoners of Conscience week at the end of 1992, identified a Bahraini, Salah Al Khawaja, aged 29, married, a businessman from a well connected and pious shia family, in fair health and serving a seven-year sentence. "While studying in India he became involved with a society of Bahraini students who criticised the lack of political and social freedoms in Bahrain. He was arrested while on a pilgrimage to Mecca and handed over to the Bahraini authorities by the Saudi Arabian police. The Bahrainis accused him of belonging to an illegal organisation. Salah was denied access to the court appointed defence counsel until just before his hearing. His family also learnt that he was tortured to make a confession," said the report.

I sent a greetings card to the prisoner and an appeal to the Amir for clemency. As a friend of Bahrain and a United Nations Association branch secretary, I was concerned that UN member states should stick to their human rights obligations, I wrote. My communications were not acknowledged.

At the next Bahrain Society meeting a member rose angrily to lambast the BBC for telling "wicked lies!" There were no political prisoners in Bahrain. There could not be. His Highness knew everything that went on. He was a good man. He would never permit political prisoners. It was all lies, lies, slander.

· He pleaded, "What can we do to answer the BBC and Amnesty and set the record straight?"

The Ambassador in London, Karim Ebrahim Al Shakar, the society's president, replied that he and the Amir had already taken issue with the BBC.

He said: "In Bahrain, we know how much we value human rights because of our traditions and Islamic culture and as Bahrainis we are one family. Bahrain is like a big village, so everybody knows what is going on. The BBC is respected in Bahrain and what it says will be known in Bahrain. Some foreign countries with a very bad human rights record try to exploit so called human rights violations. Regrettably it went too far when the BBC broadcast it.

"Some countries in the Gulf area try one way or another to discredit the name of Bahrain. We are an open society. Our prisons have been inspected by the Red Cross and we have co-operated with Amnesty International. Let them go to Bahrain, an open society, and prove this is happening. Other countries exploit our liberal laws and strong feeling about human rights which we always applaud. We are for human rights."

In the charged atmosphere of the meeting it would have been impolitic, not to say foolhardy, to say what I had in mind: that not all prisoners were behind bars, that the various governmental and commercial authorities who ignored my requests for harmless information, that people like Jishy and others in Bahrain who could not or would not enter into conversation, that decent men who simply could not believe that Bahrain's rulers were capable of doing wrong...well, we were all shackled.

Amnesty claimed, "Approximately 70 political prisoners, including possible prisoners of conscience, who had been sentenced after unfair trials in previous years remained in prison throughout 1992. Three people accused of membership of an unauthorised political organisation were sentenced to prison terms by the Supreme Civil Court of Appeal, whose procedures fall short of international human rights standards. Scores of Bahraini nationals were forcibly exiled, apparently for exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression, although restrictions preventing the return of more than 120 others were lifted.

"The State Security Measures of 1974, which permit administrative detention without charge or trial for renewable periods of up to three years, remained in force. However, they were rarely applied in 1992. Several members of the majority Shia Muslim community were detained under this law, but in contrast to previous years they were released within several days and no reports of torture were received."

Amnesty welcomed the Government's decision "to permit some Bahraini exiles to return home but remained concerned about the continuing forcible exile of others. The Interior Minister responded on most cases, providing details and offering assurances of Bahrain's commitment to human rights." Amnesty accepted an invitation to send a delegation to Bahrain, but then the Minister said January was not convenient. He promised to "be in touch" but made no fresh approach by the end of 1992.

At this time, the Amir appointed a Consultative Council (Shura) of 30 "elite and loyal men" to give advice and opinion based on the Islamic tradition of consultation. It could propose new laws and amendments, but the Government was not obliged to accept them.

I said to the ambassador, "What's the prospect of an elected assembly?"

"None, definitely. You know what it would mean?" He tapped a finger on his wine glass. "The end of this." The fundamentalists, both sunni and shia, would ban alcohol and make the veil obligatory. They would put the clock back, he said.

So there we had it. Bahrain's future hinged on alcohol (which spelt freedom and liberty) and the veil (symbol of oppression).

The ambassador appeared to mean what he said. "The religious people are dangerous, but I believe in ten years they will be finished. The people don't want them."

When Ali Fakhro, Education Minister, came to London he said spectacular advances in education created benefits and problems. Keen to learn, "more than 99 per cent" of Bahraini children attended school voluntarily, rendering legal compulsion unnecessary.

Population growth from 74,000 nationals and 16,000 foreigners in 1941 to 323,000 and 184,000 respectively in 1991 demanded a huge

expansion in education. While in 1992 education got 14 per cent of the state budget, having to compete with defence, this compared with 50 per cent in early, impoverished times.

Bahrain trawled foreign establishments for ideas and innovations, taking them on board for two years of experimentation. Universal panaceas, pupil testing, school league tables and degree-qualified teachers, were being embraced. As elsewhere, teachers were resisting. Assessment of teachers to uncover weaknesses to be righted by further training had "produced a lot of havoc and noise but we are slowly and quietly doing it," said the minister.

He used the word democracy to describe school councils in which teachers had majority representation and pupils had a say. The public would add their voice "through the newspapers." With at most 30 pupils, a teacher would know each one and their families and care for their emotional, physical and spiritual needs.

The 9,000 employees in education - including 5,800 teachers - comprised 4,700 males and 4,300 females. Every child was guaranteed a place before its sixth birthday. Primary schooling lasted six years and intermediate three years. Secondary education, three years, included vocational, scientific and religious training.

Dr Fakhro predicted: "By the end of this century, we will have no illiteracy in Bahrain."

Repeating a familiar goal - "there must be higher expectations" - he added that three out of four technical students were positively discouraged from seeking higher education (though they might enter university later as mature students) on the grounds that too many scientists would emerge, leaving too few middle-grade technicians.

The success of Bahrain University, with 6,500 students on degree courses in engineering, commerce, arts and sciences, and of the Gulf University, training doctors and scientists, was evident in local employment. Whereas in 1970 only 5 per cent of health workers were Bahrainis, now 90 per cent were. Bahrainis accounted for 60 per cent of doctors and 40 per cent of nurses. In banking, over 55 per cent were nationals, he said.

He was worried about "privileged schooling." In a cosmopolitan society, fragmentation and division were posed by ethnic schools -

Indian, Japanese, Filipino, Korean and so on - and by church schools, Catholic and Protestant, which drew in Bahrainis whose parents sought a superior, English language education.

Dr Fakhro added: "Some private schools are Bahraini. I have mixed feelings about them. They started ten years ago, mostly, unfortunately, taking rich and privileged and middle class children. I am afraid they may turn out children who will look down on the rest of society. These schools are not as cultural as our Government schools: they learn more foreign history than Arab."

In November 1993, the Bahrain Society broke new ground. A group visit to Bahrain was organised by cultural attaché Monfaradi and the Protocol Department. Numbering 60, members and kin, a leavening of young folk among old timers, we could have been mistaken for a routine Saga package tour, yet, had need arisen, we could have founded a colony, so much expertise was in our ranks. Retired or practising, we included a town planner, various engineers, a barrister, an estate manager, doctors and nurses, traders, media people, teachers, administrators and civil servants. As voluntary workers, our members were conversant with crises, ministering to homeless, suicidal, sick and disabled folk. Our services were not called on.

Led by Ambassador Shakar and society chairman Sir Harold Walker, one time Ambassador to Bahrain and Baghdad based when Iraq invaded Kuwait, we disembarked from Gulf Air economy class at Muharraq to begin five days of five-star junketing.

One way not to comprehend England is to journey at speed along the motorway, where the mounting problems of a nation in terminal decline are unnoticed. In Bahrain, we followed the highway of affluence. As guests of the Government, bussed everywhere and monitored constantly by Ministry minders, we were subjected to boundless hospitality. Conspicuous consumption turned each day into the end of Ramadhan. Sated with official dinners, luncheons and receptions, we survived ordeal by gluttony. Then, preparing for the homeward flight that would traverse caravan routes of old, we loaded our packs with riches; not silks or spices but gold watches from the Amir, gold medallions from the prime minister and cultural souvenirs and tourist kitsch pressed on us.

In case all of this raised eyebrows, Ambassador Al Shakar explained to the press that the country was showing appreciation to expatriates for services rendered in a distant past.

The Amir was first dinner host at Hamad Palace, a twin-halled edifice with high ceilings and chandeliers, tall windows symmetrically draped and vast carpets. His Highness, delicately tiny and looking his 60 years, calmly faced a handshaking queue and repeated a hundred times, "Good evening. Thank you for coming. How are you?" and forwarded guests to his brother, Khalifa, and his heir.

An assembly of nearly 200 filled every sofa around the hall, the honoured visitors joined by Government ministers, shaikhs and other dignitaries all dressed identically in Arab costume. The video cameraman slowly circumnavigated the hall, registering every face for the mandatory silent screening on TV.

The dining hall setting was immaculate, the meal lavish. It was straight down to business, no time wasting on salaams, graces, toasts or speeches. Platoons of waiters in penguin suits weaved and wheeled as they arrived with huge platters. Hors-d'oeuvre. Delicious hamour fish. Meat, four servings in succession: veal, beef fillet mignon, lamb biryani and chicken curry. Fresh fruit, ice cream, mango mousse and Umm Ali (presumably Mother of Ali). Fruit juice, no alcohol. Food kept coming. No time to converse with a neighbour. Eat, eat! The aim was sustenance not pleasure.

From my place at the bottom of a long table I observed a commotion at the distant top table. His Highness was rising, his retinue too. They filed along one wall to the door and returned to the reception hall. All followed and photographers marshalled us for group pictures. It was time to go, we were told. So early? The night was young. But I had heard the Amir was an early riser. A stickler, perhaps, for "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise!"

Next day, we lunched at the Regency Hotel. The host, Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed, said a few words about maintaining the friendly spirit of the 1820 Treaty before battle - with the victuals - commenced. The menu virtually repeated the Amir's dinner. Dessert was being served when suddenly, without warning, the host

got up from his chair and with his cronies swept down the centre aisle to the exit. Deferentially, we all stood. My companions muttered it was "Too bad." The special dish, Umm Ali, lay on the table uncaten, for the second time. At this rate we would never know what it tasted like.

I suggested we return to the table. The others shook their heads. I sat alone and ate Umm Ali (a kind of warm spiced rice pudding) and drank my coffee. A lesson taught in infancy was never forgotten: No, you can't leave the table until everyone's finished!

Three waterside lunches on successive days were free of harassment. Bapco did the honours on its still private beach at Zellaq; the Information Minister on Al Dar, an artificial leisure islet an hour's dhow ride from Mamana; and the Head of Protocol at Al Bander, a swish members-only resort newly built on the southern tip of Sitra island. A marina filled with luxury yachts and speedboats several pools and bars, a restaurant, holiday chalets and health club all made Al Bander by design exclusive. A woman in black sat in the shade, a soft drink tycoon's wife, toying with her mobile phone and camcorder. Her three infants splashed in a pool, watched by two Filipina maids on the bank. A large sign in English said: "Domestic helpers not allowed to use pools."

The British Ambassador and the Inchcape trading group gave evening receptions with suitable refreshments and the Industry Minister a dinner at our hotel, the Gulf. One dinner remained, the most relaxed, in the garden of Hussain Yateem, under the stars, amid mature banks of hibiscus, roses and bougainvillea, where a musical Arab fingered an electronic keyboard and we helped ourselves at the food mountain and wine lake and younger members of the governing elite brought their wives.

I reminded Yateem of his days as Court speechmaker and translator, particularly at the opening of the village schools by the ruler and Shaikh Abdulla. "I remember," he said. "I was a good looking young man in those days." He chuckled. "Bapco wrote the speeches," he added.

Ah, Shaikh Abdulla, his fame outlived any. A Bapco manager, Mohammed Jaffari, in charge of education, told me of the tears he shed when the oil company rejected his application for a

messenger's job because he wrote Age 14 on his form. The shaikh intervened and told the firm the boy had made a mistake: he was really 16. He got the job!

Moving in charmed circles, where a buoyant mood was part of the job, we were infected with the spirit that all was well in Bahrain. To hint at caution, as I was apt to do, was to court indignation. Even a former political prisoner radiated optimism, indicating increasing freedom in the media (and twenty more cable TV channels on the way!), a public awareness that Bahrain was small, exposed, not rich like its neighbours, did not want Kuwait's political system, wanted order and employment and would work out its own destiny, people and governors in harmony...yes the portents were good. He was less certain about a rumour that the Amir would declare an amnesty for the remaining 1981 coup prisoners come Ramadhan 1994.

He believed the consultative council was honest and efficient. Indeed, the Amir had just praised that body for completing its first term in co-operating with the Government, "through sincere and objective dialogue" setting an example that the Saudi Government was thinking about copying.

An institution I had never heard of now had offices on the edge of Manama, prominently signposted The General Committee of Bahrain Workers. It was urging private employers to keep workers on beyond the statutory 60 retirement age and hand jobs down from father to son. It also wanted welfare provisions for pensioners.

Bahrain's strength was its unity. A young teacher dinned that into me when I had the temerity to allude to a growing gap between rich and poor. "If some people work hard and make a lot of money and other people earn less money that does not matter. We are one, a united people," he said by way of rebuke.

The teacher was a grafter, doing casual work as well as taking an intermediate class of 45 children, no mean task considering that teaching wasn't simply conveying information but instilling comprehension and discipline. No doubt he also instructed them in patriotism, which was the stronger in himself after a recent holiday in Russia. Oh, he was so glad to be back in Bahrain, he said. No crime, no violence, and everyone united and proud of their Amir.

He liked poetry and recited a stanza from Robert Frost. He also said, "If there's a paradise, it is Bahrain."

He was acting as an official guide. "He's giving us the party line and going over the top," I whispered to my wife. "He's speaking from the heart," she said.

I fancied I had upset the teacher. He was not alone. Others who asked for my opinion on Bahrain took as grievous bodily harm any answer going beyond a crisp, unequivocal "Bahrain is great!" It is not easy coming from an old mature country where lambasting or lampooning the establishment is common currency to another where suspension of critical faculties is the norm. Satisfying material wants and sensual pleasures is enough. Thinking is superfluous.

Yet some people were thinking and questioning. A week's reading of the local newspapers might not adequately reflect life, but I was struck by the boldness of readers' letters. People were actually criticising public services and official spokesmen had to respond. In one remarkable letter, an Arab urged poor Bahrainis to take domestic jobs done by foreign servants, even undercutting the meagre wages. An Arab woman, complaining about philandering husbands, was shocked by talk of Filipinas being replaced by white Romanian housemaids.

From our bus window, an upsurge of construction was apparent: more land reclaimed from the sea, international companies laying foundation stones for new tower blocks, the Government erecting pre-cast apartments in four-storey blocks for sale to occupants for a quarter of their wages over 25 years.

But how about downtown Manama? Was that a scene of renewal and rehabilitation? I wandered through the grimy narrow lanes for an hour before sunset. Nothing had changed. Same sweaty, cramped slums for sleeping in and the same tiny, squalid workshops for labouring in. Good enough for poor Arabs and wretched foreigners. But I sensed an undercurrent of change, a mood I picked up from the English-language newspapers. Things were not exactly as they had been before the Gulf War, which could have been a turning point. All the Gulf states were wrestling with economic problems. Most had budget deficits. War costs and massive fraud had hit Kuwait in particular badly, slashing its reserves, and a hint from its

finance minister that Kuwait might have to consider income tax sent a shudder the length of the Gulf.

Greedily seeking a bigger share of the oil market, with Iraqi exports embargoed by the UN, Gulf states were overproducing. All suffered lower income as the price of a barrel slumped from 20 dollars to below 15. All knew what they had to do - bring home the hundreds of billions of dollars invested in the West and set up indigenous plants, employing their own nationals. But how? The World Bank told the Arab governments to study the way Japan and the Far East were succeeding with high technology industries.

Unemployment, a stimulus to lawlessness, was becoming a burden as burgeoning young populations reached working age. They could take the jobs of expatriates, but they needed the will and the skill. Arabisation had to be accelerated, all agreed. Education and training were the keys.

The Gulf governments had paid off the Gulf University's debts and pulled out. It was now the superior second campus of Bahrain University, with the state's largest car park. "The university is presently undergoing a major metamorphosis touching on every aspect of its life," cryptically announced its president, Ibrahim Jamal al-Hashemi, in the 1993-1994 Catalogue which, in 500 pages, laid out hundreds of courses incorporating subjects such as synchronised swimming, Shakespeare and psychology. Founded in 1987, Bahrain University had adopted "a philosophy of academic rigour...The guiding principle is to keep the pulse of life throbbing between this educational institution and the fast changing socio-economic scene of the country it serves."

All 6,000 students had to take a science/engineering foundation course. The faculties appeared to be high powered, largely composed of foreign Arabs (mainly British in the English department) with humble lecturers easily outnumbered by professors, assistant professors and associate professors. The Amir, the university's Supreme President, contributed "insightful directives" as the university pursued "a course of excellence," said the handbook.

After literacy, numeracy was less scrupulously observed, numbers just a game. I suspected anything with noughts on the end. At Saar,

where Robert Killick, director of the London-Bahrain archaeological expedition had uncovered a fishing village and a temple, descent by a few footsteps from 1993 AD to circa 1993 BC had carbon dating authority. But tourist officials added on another millenium or two.

Then there were the tombs. A Department of Tourism documentary numbered them at 172,000. A guide from the department said there were 700,000.

As for the Khalifas, the information minister said the family numbered between 6,000 and 7,000 in 1991. Two years later, a journalist insisted there were 10,000 now. "They're not all rich," she told me. "Some are poor and won't work. The Amir built a compound for those and he maintains them."

Before this last trip, I came across some more old photos and made a batch of prints for the museum. I took a few to the Hamad Palace reception, where the prime minister was fascinated by them. "I'll bring some more tomorrow," I told him.

On the way out I said to an aide, "I would like to have a private interview with the prime minister. Would that be possible?" The functionary promised, "I will phone him in the morning."

Next morning, at a handshaking ceremony at Government House, I handed the prime minister a folder full of photos with the words, "Take out what you want and return the rest to me for the museum." He smiled and said, "I will do that." He said nothing about an interview.

During the next three days, I badgered officials to get my pictures back, to no avail. It occurred to me that I had said he could take what he wanted and perhaps the PM decided he wanted the lot. After breakfast on the last day, as we waited for the bus to the airport, someone called to me, "A man from the prime minister's looking for you with a package." A fine time for returning the photos, I thought.

The messenger approached me. "Mr Mapp? The prime minister sends you this gift." No pictures, but a small box, an expertly wrapped cube. Inside was a card, With the PM's Compliments, and a wristwatch. Worth, so I'm told, a small fortune.

Largesse, baksheesh, did not stop there. The Amir graciously instructed his court officials to settle our hotel bills, the final gesture in a programme marked by polite constraint and convention in which natural effervescence surfaced just once. It was aboard a pleasure dhow, swaying in a swell approaching Manama. As the sun set, a frantic Arab tune blared from the radio. Everyone, Bahrainis and Brits, caught the rhythm and clapped in time and an Arab and I found ourselves centre stage on the unsteady upper deck engaging in a spirited, impromptu, absurd fandango. It was hilarious.

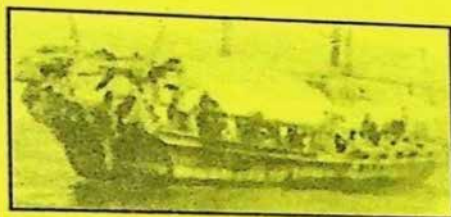
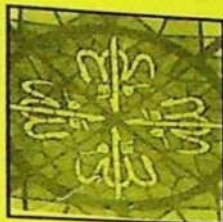
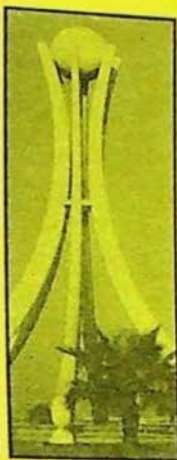
A sober look at Bahrain had to wait until early in 1994 - three years after Desert Storm - when the British commander in the war, General Sir Peter de la Billiere, translated to Government Middle East adviser, gave his considered judgement to the Bahrain Society in London.

He cast his eyes to the end of this century - the medium term, he called it - and foresaw a period of calm. But he conceded he might be proved wrong. Though unlikely, Arab states might acquire nuclear know how and use it to dominate.

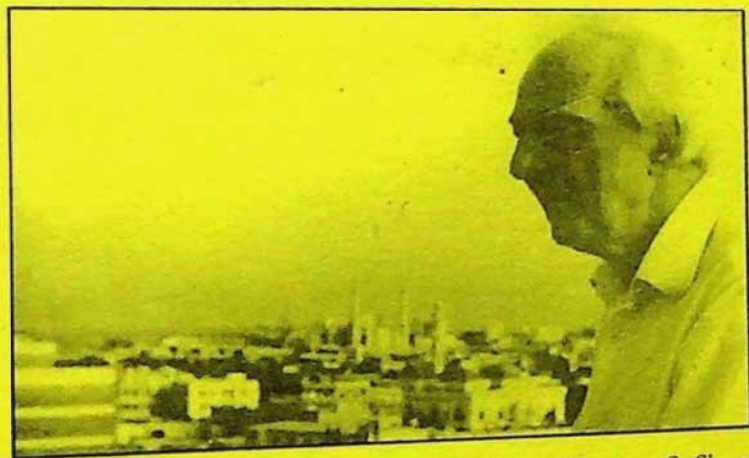
Iran and Iraq were war weary, but they had bases which could be resurrected.

The greatest threat, again improbable, could come from India, even Pakistan, which, gripped by soaring birthrate, might view Bahrain and the other Gulf states as a homeland for surplus population - and might coerce Indian expatriate workers in the Gulf to effect domination.

An alternative external menace was revolution inspired by religious fundamentalists. The general added that if these hypotheses were discounted, one concern that the shaikhly and Saudi rulers must address was the possibility of internal unrest arising from the failure to recognise the political and liberal aspirations of burgeoning new generations.



LEAVE WELL ALONE!



Born in London's Dockland, first of five children Bert Mapp left school at 14 and, via shipping, farming and oil, made a career in journalism. His experiences and subsequent Gulf events, spanning 40 years are chronicled in this book.