

I am writing this from a hotel in Madrid where Peter and I are grabbing a few days break before having to properly adjust to life back in London. We are still finding it hard to believe that our 3 years in Riyadh have flown by so quickly and that the reins at the Embassy's trade team have been handed over to the extremely capable hands of Paul Williams and Tim Dearden. All I can say is that it was a thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding period in our lives and the RGBB board and membership played a huge part in making it such a memorable experience for both of us.



Farewell Riyadh

by Sharon Wardle

I was asked by the RGBB board to write some valedictory comments reflecting on our time in Saudi Arabia over the past three years. We arrived in Riyadh in January 2005 at a time when Saudis and Westerners alike were reeling from a series of horrific terrorist attacks and many companies, individuals and their families had chosen to leave. Within just a week of our starting work in Riyadh, British Airways announced that they were pulling out. In fact it would be fair to say that at the time, even many of our colleagues at UK Trade & Investment headquarters in London were at best lukewarm and at worst openly negative about the prospects for business in Saudi.

that we have seen in the past few months alone. In 2005 it was only really the MEA that kept up the tradition and visited Saudi twice. So far in 2008, we have seen groups visiting from Invest Northern Ireland, Railway Industry Organisation, British Water, the Association of British Healthcare Industries and of course the Lord Mayor of the City of London and accompanying financial services delegation. On the near horizon, we are expecting a security delegation, International Business Wales plus several trade missions visiting together to coincide with the British Week, organised by the Trade Office in Al Khobar. The highlight will have been a visit by Digby Lord Jones, Minister for Trade, aimed at reinforcing the message that the Brits are committed to further developing the bilateral trade relationship.

The picture three years on couldn't be more different and whilst the Embassy cannot take the credit for all the external factors that have come into play, it was great to be leaving with enthusiasm amongst the British business community at a real high. The improved security situation and economic boom have created a whole new swathe of opportunities for UK business. Where the UK Trade & Investment teams across Saudi Arabia have played their part, has been in raising awareness amongst stakeholders and individual companies in the UK of the opportunities that exist, and organising activities aimed at encouraging business out to the market.

But as I am writing for the RGBB News what I really want to do is use this opportunity to say a particular thank you for all the support and friendship that the membership have shown us. Collectively and individually, you have been hugely helpful to us both in terms of understanding what is really happening in the market, but also where we have needed to draw on individual expert knowledge of specific sectors. And we couldn't possibly ignore the social side of the RGBB which, to say the least, has been huge fun. Before arriving in Saudi, never in a million years did we imagine the extent and liveliness of the social scene. The RGBB balls (and Mr Mead's injudicious photography!) will remain imprinted on our memories for years to come.....

This has been very much a team effort involving all three Posts (Jeddah, Al Khobar and Riyadh) across the Kingdom and I am hugely grateful to the entire UKTI Saudi network and the Saudi desk at our headquarters for all the work that they put in to getting Saudi Arabia back on the map amongst UK business. Perhaps the best indication of how things have turned around has been the number of visiting trade missions

I trust that Paul and Tim will be made to feel just as welcome as were. Very, very best of luck for the future to everyone and I sincerely hope that our paths will cross again.

New Arrival

Replacing Sharon with immediate effect is Paul Williams. Paul comes to Saudi Arabia from a position as Regional Director, East of England but he is no stranger to international postings having spent some time in Houston, Texas and in Muscat, Oman from 1993 to 1998.

the year. Paul's two sons will undoubtedly visit at some point but with one of them still in full time education and the other already in work this will not be for a little while.

Brought up in Bath, Paul says he's now 'retired' from contact sports but used to play regularly for Bath Rugby Club 'long' before it became the glamorous club it is today. He is a keen scuba diver though, and hopes to sharpen his skills with the odd visit to the Red Sea whilst he's based in the Kingdom.



Paul Williams
Director
Trade & Investment