



Above: Right to left Nigel Astbury, RGBB Committee; Sharon Wardle, British Embassy; Dr Fahad Al-Semmari, KAF; Owain Raw-Rees, AXA Insurance & RGBB Committee

success an Egyptian Expeditionary Force recaptured the Hijaz. In the following years through continuous military onslaught the Saudi state weakened and in September 1818 Abdullah Ibn Saud surrendered and al-Diriya was sacked. Abdullah was taken into exile in Constantinople where in December he was executed.

Subsequent to the fall of the First Saudi State and for many years the history of this part of the Arabian Peninsula remained that of internecine strife and only in 1843 following the evacuation of Egyptian forces did the Al Saud fortunes revive. Under the leadership of Faisal Ibn Turki, a great grandson of Mohammed Al Saud, the Saudi state was re-established, however this revival was relatively short lived and indeed could more properly be described as the Emirate of Riyadh and was effectively independent of the Ottoman control. The death of Faisal in 1865 led to power struggles between his sons – indeed in the eleven years following his death there were eight changes in the rulers of Riyadh. This in conjunction with the ascendancy of the Al Rashid in Hail and a renewed interest in re-establishing Ottoman authority led to the disintegration of Al Saud authority and in 1893 Faisal's fourth son Abdurahman was in exile in Kuwait.

In 1880 a son was born to Abdurahman Ibn Faisal, Abulaziz Ibn Abdurahman Ibn Faisal Al Saud and to this son, commonly known as Ibn Saud, fell the mantle of leadership of the house of Al Saud. In 1902 through military daring he took the Masmak Fort in Riyadh and set into motion the development of the current Saudi state. By military success Abdulaziz expanded his realm and took control in turn Hail in the north, in 1913 Al Ahsaa in the East, in 1920 Asir in the south, in 1921 Shammar in the north and in December 1924 accepted the allegiance of the notables of Jeddah and was declared in 1926 King of Hijaz and Sultan of Nejd. Upon further consolidation on 23 September 1932 he was proclaimed King of Saudi Arabia.

Initial contact with Britain was abrupt – the expansion of the First Saudi State along the Gulf coast from Kuwait to Oman was contrary to Britain's colonial interests. Britain's focus on control of trading routes with India was paramount and British agents

in the Gulf also doubled up as political representatives. The establishment of naval dominance by the British to enforce this control resulted in use of military action against Saudi forces and allies in Kuwait, Bahrain and in 1809 in Ras Al Khaima. Following the fall of al-Diriya the British then viewed a strengthened Egypt and its occupation of Arabia with suspicion and a British squadron landed troops in Qatif as a demonstration of control of the sea. With the establishment of the Second Saudi State the conflict over territorial expansion and control of trade continued - in 1850 a British squadron prevented a Saudi invasion of Bahrain and by 1861 Britain had concluded formal agreements with Bahrain and a number of Trucial States. British naval forces even bombarded the fort in Dammam to enforce the status quo in Bahrain.

The collapse of the Second Saudi State and the ascendancy of the Al Rashid in the north with support from Istanbul meant that the British now saw the revived Ottoman interest in the Arabia as a threat to their trade interest and thus sought to support those in opposition to the Ottoman Empire. In 1899 Britain signed a secret treaty with Kuwait supporting not only Kuwait but indirectly its allies the house of Saud. In 1903 in Bahrain a representative of Ibn Saud met with the British Political agent requesting assistance in preventing a possible landing of Turkish troops – no formal response was given but it was the beginning of a more formal relationship. In 1904 contact was made with Major Percy Cox, the Political Resident in the Gulf, who accurately assessed the importance of Ibn Saud and recommended increased ties. In 1910 Captain Shakespear, the Political Agent in Kuwait, met with Ibn Saud and in 1911 agreement was reached on areas of co-operation leading to a formal treaty of Al Qatif in 1915. During the First World War the focus in Arabia was the "Arab Revolt" however by the end of the war and the years thereafter the consolidation of the position of Ibn Saud as the pre-eminent power on the Peninsula became self evident. In 1922 Cox and Ibn Saud signed the Treaty of Al Uqair delineating the northern borders between Iraq and Nejd and further such border agreements were made in 1925 concluding with the Treaty of Jeddah in 1927 recognising the complete and absolute independence of Ibn Saud's possessions.

In this brief resume of the early history of the Saudi nation and its relationship with Britain it is clear that British self interest has dictated the manner in which it developed. Notwithstanding this self interest a number of notable Britons – administrators, explorers and soldiers such as Gertrude Bell, Lady Anne Blunt, Richard Burton, Gilbert Clayton, Sir Percy Cox, Charles Doughty, William Palgrave, Captain Shakespear and Harry St. John Bridger Philby have all through their lives and published works contributed to the recorded history of the region.