

Right:HMA meets with former RGBB Chairman John Freel at the Saudi British Joint Business Council reception



Right:HMA greets guests, Gerry and Anne Waters, at the QBP in Riyadh



Right:HMA greets guests, Brian and Sandie Hawley at the QBP in Jeddah



Below:HMA opens the British Council Photographic Exhibition in Jeddah in April



Q. An Ambassadors job used to be said to consist of representation, reporting, negotiating and protection. Does that adequately sum up your role in Saudi Arabia?

The role of Ambassador in Saudi Arabia is much more akin to the traditional than my previous jobs in Sudan and Iraq. The extent of British interests means that I am involved in many different areas from strategic issues relating to regional politics and security to trade and investment and protection of British citizens. Increasingly Ambassadors are CEOs for UK Ltd ensuring that the various components parts are well led and operating as a coherent whole.

Q. I would guess that with modern communications and the relative ease of air-travel, an Ambassadors role has changed since you first entered the service. Have these changes helped or hindered the role an Ambassador now has to play?

Well I don't remember the days when it took weeks or months for messages to be exchanged with London. In those days Ambassadors had a higher degree of autonomy but less information on what London wanted. Now you are much more a part of the decision making process and Ministers look to you for direct advice as the expert on the country.

Q. I believe that Simon MacDonald, who also served previously as DHM in Riyadh is now the Senior Foreign Policy maker to our new Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Do either of these changes in Downing Street impact on the job you are here to do?

I suppose it helps to have someone in No 10 who knows and understands Saudi Arabia but it is too early to say. The Prime Minister has always taken a close interest in our relations with Saudi Arabia because of their importance. I do not expect that to change.

Q. Being Her Majesty's Ambassador to an important country like Saudi Arabia must be incredibly time consuming. Do you ever get any time to yourself and if so what do you do to 'unwind'?

It is important to maintain a balance. I try to keep Friday as a day of relaxation. Although Thursday is also a day off it is difficult to only have 3 days of overlap with London. But I like to play golf and tennis and I hope to do some diving. I like the theatre and cinema but I tend to overdose on that when I am back in London. Vanessa and I used to enjoy our trips to the desert when we were last here so we look forward to resuming that activity when the weather cools a bit. I have also inherited the care of two falcons from my predecessor. I have ordered some books on falconry so that will be a new interest.