

RGBB News

Just over a year ago, we said our Good Byes to William & Philipa Kirkpatrick who were off to pastures-new in Qatar. Now they're back in Riyadh, and before the luggage has even arrived, they're out and about catching up. While she's been away, Philipa was awarded an M.B.E. in the New Years honours list. The RGBB News asked her to tell how it all came about.

It was November 19th 2006 – 8am – when the telephone rang. I was in the bedroom. A very cultured voice said "This is the British Embassy." He then went on to say "I have been instructed to inform you" ... at which point, I thought oh no what protocol have I broken now!

He continued, "you have been awarded an M.B.E." I very ungraciously said "WHAT?..." He repeated himself and I said "WHY?" He said "for outstanding services to the British Community in Saudi Arabia." I replied "ARE YOU SURE?" The poor man did his best to convince me and then suggested I might like to call him back.

I called my husband and said, "is anyone with you?" He said "yes." I said "get rid of them and call me back." He dutifully did as he was told and I told him I'd been given an MBE. He very calmly said, "I suspected you might!"

Apparently questions had been asked and information gathered all in the greatest secrecy and I was completely unaware.

I called the charming DHM at the Embassy and we went over it again. He asked me "can I tell Her Majesty that you will accept the award?". "Absolutely I said"

I was then told that I could not tell anyone until it appeared in the newspapers at the end of December. That was the longest 6 weeks of my life...

I chose March 7th to attend the investiture at Buckingham Palace. The great day finally arrived. The suit, hat and bag had been purchased. I decided to wear shoes I was familiar with as I knew I had to walk backwards at some stage in the ceremony. I learnt later that this was a smart move as some of the ladies had new shoes and their feet were killing them!

We arrived at The Palace as instructed at 10am and our driver got in line outside the Palace gates. There were already people there in cars and on the pavement outside the Palace railings. Everyone looked so lovely. Ladies in their outfits and matching hats, gentlemen in their morning suits and top hats.

It was then I remembered – I had no ID.



Philipa collects her M.B.E.

I had the smallest bag I have ever owned – totally impractical and purely for decoration so I had pared down the contents to a lipstick and handkerchief.

My stomach was doing summersaults!!

I have been in the Middle East most of my adult life and I don't go in the garden without ID. I get to UK and go to Buckingham palace and tra la la!

Fortunately the police accepted my business card and everyone in the car vouched for me. The policeman said, "are you the recipient by any chance" (with a knowing smile).

As we drove up to the grand entrance we got out and entered the Palace. What an amazing sight, I have never seen so much red carpet. We went up the grand staircase and then recipients were taken to the painting room and the guests were taken to the grand ballroom to be seated.

We were then given a briefing by Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Ford, an extremely charming and funny man.

He took us through the ceremony - showing the ladies how to curtsy (he was in full uniform, including spurs!) and telling us that they would be taking our handbags off us and the quality of our curtsy would determine if we got them back or not.

He told us that The Queen would be on a raised dais and asked us not to climb on to the dais as it was already rather crowded! We were also told that as we approach Her Majesty our toes should touch the dais. If not, and we were too far away, she might fall off when trying to pin the medal on!

We were 95 recipients in all - famous people - Gareth Edwards and Johnny Briggs (Mike Baldwin in Coronation Street).

The whole thing took 1 hour and 5 minutes so you can see it was very well organised. The orchestra of the Cold Stream Guards played throughout the investiture.