

Chairman's Speech to the Bahrain Society Dinner Monday 8 November 2010

Your Excellencies, My Lords, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, and, of course, members of the Bahrain Society, some of whom have travelled long distances to be here. I welcome you all to the Bahrain Society Dinner of 2010.

May I please particularly welcome our two Minister guests, Her Excellency Sheikha Mai bint Mohammed al Khalifa, the Minister of Culture of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and Mr Ed Vaisey, the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries in the British Coalition Government. We will have the pleasure of hearing them speak as soon as you have got rid of me.

Happily for all of you, it is not my task to make a long speech this evening, but I just want to tell you that the Bahrain Society has had a good and varied year and our meetings have been very well attended. This, I think, proves your Committee must be getting something right! Our meetings give us all a chance to keep up to date with doings in Bahrain, and to maintain some contact with the country in which most of us have lived, and for which we have such affection.

I must pay tribute to His Excellency Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Khalifa, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and, wearing a different hat, the President of our Society. He is a great supporter of the Society and without the help he and his Embassy staff give us, we would not be in such a sound position. His Private Secretary, Mrs Maha Shihata, who I am so pleased is here this evening, fields my many telephone calls and visits to the Embassy superbly, and with fortitude and great good humour.

Our Society Secretary, Mr Vic Whittingham, has worked tirelessly for the success of our meetings during the year, and has had such a big hand in the arrangements for this evening. I thank him on behalf of the Society, and say to him that there is no way I can allow him to retire during my time as Chairman !

Many of you will know that our former Chairman, Mr Michael Rice, has been in and out of hospital for much of this year, having had a nasty fall in January. He has asked that I read a message from him to the Society: So, in Michael's words,

Your Excellencies, My Lords, Distinguished Guests, Dear Friends, I am sad not to be with you this evening but, as many of you will know, I am recuperating from a long and depressing experience of major surgery. Whilst I was incarcerated in an equally depressing series of hospitals I was immensely encouraged by the number of kind messages which I received from members of the Society and from the Embassy, senior members of both of which visited me in various hospitals. My problem arose from the recent acquisition of two Dachshund puppies that I took for a walk in the grounds of the house where I live. It was New Year's Day and after a massive snowstorm. I slipped on hidden ice and that was IT. I would like to make it clear that the puppies were not to blame. Indeed, while I was laid out on the ground, they did their best to help me get up. When they realised that they alone could not achieve my resurrection, they took to running up and down barking furiously until help arrived. Dachshunds are known for their intelligence and so I am thinking of putting the Dog puppy's name down for Winchester !!:I am especially sorry not to be able to greet Sheikha Mai. I well remember our meeting in the Bahrain Museum some years ago. I was greatly impressed then by her concern for Bahrain's heritage, a concern which I share. And I am sorry too not to have had the opportunity to meet Mr Vaisey. I would have welcomed the chance to discuss with him the preservation of the historic environment in this country and abroad. Another time perhaps.....

My very best wishes to you all, Michael Rice

My last mention must go to the staff of the Army and Navy Club. I fear we have tried their patience sorely this year. The popularity of this evening has meant we are above the number they are usually able to cater for. I hope we have not made it too difficult for them, and that the squeeze was not too uncomfortable for all of you. Stanley, may I ask you to convey our thanks to all the staff of the Club.