

## History of the Middle East Centre Archive: 1961-2007

by *Debbie Usher*

The history of the Private Papers Collection, or as it known today the Middle East Centre Archive, is a one of ingenuity and determination. Elizabeth Monroe, who was a founding fellow of the Middle East Centre and a respected academic with a career in journalism, was the driving force behind the founding and early success of the Archive. With the support of Albert Hourani a collection of private papers relating to the Middle East was begun in 1961. In 2007 the collection of private papers has grown to over 400 collections with a photographic collection in excess of 100,000 images.

The success of the Archive in becoming an internationally renowned research resource owes a great debt to the original vision of Elizabeth Monroe. Although the Archive does hold the papers of 'great men' such as Sir Percy Cox, Glubb Pasha, St John Philby and Sir Miles Lampson to name a few, it also holds a multitude of papers of missionaries, businessmen, soldiers and civil administrators of all ranks. For Elizabeth Monroe saw that 'papers put together by a welfare officer, a hospital sister, a soldier...or an observant traveller may have just as great a historical worth'. The historian is thus given the opportunity to study a great diversity of subjects from political to social, cultural and economic history. The focus of the Archive established by Elizabeth Monroe was to collect private papers of people who have lived or served in the Middle East. In 1961 many such private papers were in great danger of being lost as a generation with imperial experience died and bequeathed 'its goods to flat-dwellers who have no room for old papers'. Yet as Elizabeth Monroe wrote in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1966 'private papers reveal moments of truth...far removed from the bland assurance that is bound to mark statements of public policy'. For 'they provide a living picture of the perplexities and anxieties, the frustrations as well as the triumphs...that colour the process of government in any territory.' The historian would thus need such material to supplement the official record and provide additional colour, context and depth of understanding of the past. The need for preservation of such material was clear, but how did Elizabeth Monroe come to take on the ambitious role of founding an Archive?

### Genesis of the Archive: Elizabeth Monroe 1961-1972

The idea of founding an Archive and the initial collection of private papers in 1961 grew out of Elizabeth Monroe's research for her book *Britain's moment in the Middle East 1914-1956*. As Elizabeth Monroe wrote to the Leverhulme Trust in 1965 'the genesis of the project is that, when I was working on the book on British policy published in 1963 which your Trustees sponsored and for which they made me an advance, I located enough material in private hands to realise that an

index of the whereabouts of papers would be invaluable to scholars. Some owners gave their papers to St Antony's or lent them permanently. I therefore started approaching others on the basis of a large acquaintance among people who had worked in the area. This I have done in my spare time for four years, with the results shown in the schedule that I enclose.'

However 'the list of possible owners snowballs, and the job has begun to take up an inordinate amount of the time that I ought to be devoting to teaching and to writing another book. Also, time presses. Most of the people on the list of those to be tackled are old, and, if they die or move house, their papers tend to be destroyed.' Consequently Elizabeth Monroe wrote to the Leverhulme Trust in 1965 to request a grant of £1,000 a year for three years to employ a part-time assistant and to cover travel expenses, photography, postage and carriage of Archives.

Elizabeth Monroe's application to the Leverhulme Trust took the form of a two page letter and not 'the routine form because the application does not seem exactly to fit into any of the classes of grant that you advertise.' Despite this the funding bid was successful. Perhaps the Leverhulme Trust saw a project that was already well under way and that would undoubtedly be more successful with a little money considering Elizabeth Monroe's large acquaintance of people who might have papers. Elizabeth Monroe also packaged the work as a project with a defined end asserting 'there is a term to the work. If I could employ and direct a part-time assistant for three years, we could I think cover the whole ground, including co-relating our collection with those in university libraries elsewhere...' It is hard to know now whether Elizabeth Monroe really believed that all the work of collecting papers could be done in three years or whether this was a deliberate ploy to soothe potential fears that the Leverhulme Trust might have of supporting an undertaking which would need continual funding. Either way funding was now available to expand the search for papers.

Mrs Hilary Bullard was employed as the first part time assistant for the Archive in January 1966. To make the best use of funding an arrangement was made with the Middle East Centre Library whereby Mrs Bullard worked part time for the library 'in the same building and so is available to attend to visitors at any moment in the week.' The Archive's visitor book was started at this time and records the first visitor on the 18<sup>th</sup> February 1966. If the visitor's book was accurately kept then the academic year 1966-1967 saw 16 researchers make 32 visits to the Archive. Not a small number considering the as yet small size and recent nature of the collection. However the main task facing the fledgling Archive at this stage was not so much the servicing of researchers but the search for new collections.

The systematic search for papers had begun before Leverhulme Trust funding with the printing of a leaflet in January 1961 entitled the 'History of British Policy and Achievement in the Middle East'. This set out the aim of the Middle East Centre to create an index of private papers and to 'act as custodian of them if their present owners wish, now or in the future, to deposit them in a

place where they will be accessible to scholars in proper conditions.’ It included a tear off slip for replies with the request for suggestions as to ‘other possible owners or sources of material’. Prior to July 1965 it had also been arranged that ‘Sir Gawain Bell who served both in Palestine and with the Arab Legion should undertake a special search for Palestine material on behalf of the Centre.’ The new Leverhulme Trust funding enabled an expansion of efforts with the printing of a new leaflet in Spring 1966 and in the much needed administrative support of Mrs Bullard.

Apart from Elizabeth Monroe’s own contacts as the 1967 Annual Report noted ‘additions to the collection are located chiefly by the snowball method: donors recommend other donors; visiting researchers often suggest acquiring or photographing papers that they have located’. The lists of papers in private custody compiled by the Historical Manuscripts Commission were also of help in suggesting possible leads. As were membership lists produced by organisations such as the Palestine Association or Foreign Office lists used in conjunction with Who’s Who. Friends who had served in the Middle East typed lists of people they knew of that might have papers. Elizabeth Monroe also started to cultivate a community of people interested in the Archive by the development of a mailing list of libraries and individuals which by 1969 numbered 210. An Annual Report listing new accessions was sent to everyone on the mailing list which served as a gentle reminder to those still in possession of papers of the merit of following the example of others in depositing material. Personal letters from Elizabeth Monroe and the leaflet asking for papers or information on the whereabouts of papers were also included to encourage new deposits from recalcitrant potential donors. Years later at her memorial service in 1986 Albert Hourani described Elizabeth Monroe’s work in searching for papers as involving ‘much correspondence, visits to retired officials and their families, and the exercise of patience and diplomacy.’

Whilst patience and diplomacy could be applied to known potential donors the question still remained as to how to cast the net more widely and find those potential donors in the first place. How could the work of the Archive be more widely publicised? The answer was that Elizabeth Monroe teamed up with the Oxford University Colonial Records Project to put on a joint exhibition at Rhodes House Library in May 1966.

The Oxford University Colonial Records Project was in many ways a natural partner for Elizabeth Monroe’s work in building up the Private Papers Collection. The Project had been set up in January 1963 with initial funding from the University’s Beit Fund. The aim, as John Tawney noted in his *African Affairs* article of 1968, was to discover, ‘in as short a time as possible the maximum number of privately owned papers’ relating to ‘the period of colonial administration in all the territories administered by the British Colonial Office at the time when that department was reconstituted in 1925.’ This naturally meant that the focus and indeed the bulk of the records found by the Project related to Africa. These were deposited in Rhodes House Library. However an

arrangement was made with Elizabeth Monroe so that by August 1963 Middle Eastern material, especially that relating to the Palestine Mandate, was to be directed to the Middle East Centre. The Project was as noted in the May 1964 *African Studies Bulletin* 'primarily a rescue operation' with a policy 'to co-operate with others involved in the same field.' The same ethos was held by Elizabeth Monroe who noted in her Report for 1966 that 'the collection is run in close co-operation with the Oxford University Colonial Records Project and the Durham Archive' with staff also remaining 'in touch with other interested bodies, notably the Historical Manuscripts Commission...' Undoubtedly the Archive benefited greatly in its search for papers from this environment of professional co-operation.

The joint exhibition show casing new accessions and the work of the Oxford University Colonial Records Project and the Middle East Centre's Private Papers Collection was held over three days, from Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> to Friday 27<sup>th</sup> May 1966. The schedule for the exhibition was an advance press showing on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup>, followed by a formal opening of the exhibition to the general public by the Vice Chancellor Sir Kenneth Wheare on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> May. Elizabeth Monroe's background in journalism certainly helped in attracting journalists to attend the advance showing, as in many cases she was inviting journalists that she already knew. With an eye to potential funding Elizabeth Monroe also sent personal invitations to contacts in oil companies such as BP and to make an interesting party invited some donors of papers such as George Rendel and his daughter. The advance press showing was followed in true Oxford College fashion by what Kenneth Rose (of the Sunday Telegraph) described as a 'luncheon' that was 'ambrosial' with 'that most distinguished little party of guests'.

The exhibition and the advance press showing was a great success. Newspapers which carried articles about the exhibition included *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Jewish Chronicle*, *Telegraph*, *The Economist* and *The Oxford Mail*. As the introduction to the catalogue of exhibits explained 'one object of the present exhibition is to bring the collections to the notice of otherwise untraceable people'. The publicity certainly helped to advertise the collection to potential new donors. It was also seen in later years as forming almost an official opening of the Archive. As Albert Hourani put it in his 1986 memorial address for Elizabeth Monroe, the Archive was 'begun in 1961 and announced publicly in 1966...' Elizabeth Monroe noted in her Report for 1966 that an 'outcome of the good press coverage received by this exhibition has been increased use of the collection by scholars from all over the world.'

Indeed one of the enduring features of the Archive since records of its use started in 1966 is the international character of the researchers using it. Elizabeth Monroe's Report for 1967 noted researchers visiting from 'the Universities of Cambridge, London (SOAS and the London School of Economics), Durham, York, Columbia, Harvard, A.U.B., Stanford, Manitoba, the Hebrew

University of Jerusalem' and 'the University of Tel Aviv'. By 1969 Elizabeth Monroe could report that 'thanks to citation in books and articles, the existence of the collection is better known; therefore, far more scholars are using it.' One of the unexpected benefits for the Middle East Centre of this increased use was, as Elizabeth Monroe noted in a letter to Lord Murray, 'the degree to which the Section is beginning to extend our acquaintance among scholars interested in the Middle East and on visit to Britain.'

However the success of the Archive in attracting researchers came at a price. By 1971 it was noted in the Annual Report that citation in published books had 'caused a considerable increase in postal enquiries' which 'now make as many demands as does indexing on the time and knowledge of the staff'. Even in the full 1968 Annual Report it was noted that enquiry correspondence 'advising visitors and Xeroxing documents...occupies my graduate assistant for most of her three days a week. As a result indexing of accessions gets behind, and is now sadly in arrear. So far, we have managed to draw abreast of it in each summer vacation, provided I help.' Strain was clearly being felt in managing the work load of the new Archive. However the pressing need to continue the search and rescue of papers continued whilst the prospect of an end to Leverhulme Trust funding cast its threatening shadow.

Leverhulme Trust funding had originally been for three years from 1966 to the end of 1968. However with careful use the money had been stretched to 1969 when the Warden wrote to Lord Murray at the Leverhulme Trust asking for funding for another two years. Elizabeth Monroe was to retire in 1972 and the Warden argued that additional funding would be well spent now whilst she was still at the College where 'we can take advantage of her enormous acquaintance in the Middle East.' The task of collecting was still presented as having a defined end as 'obviously, the supply of donors is not inexhaustible. We realised from the start that there would be a term to the period during which hunting up fresh owners of documents would be worth while. But the attached list of accessions in 1970 suggests that this is not yet. Can you enable us to go on until, in 1972, we take over the servicing of readers and enquiries as part of our normal library activities?' With the promise of taking over made the Leverhulme Trust agreed to a two year extension but noted that as the College was 'prepared to take over the servicing of readers and enquiries as part of its normal activities' it was assumed that the Trust 'would not be appealed to for further help at the end of the period of extension.'

The work of the Archive in searching for new collections and providing a service for researchers was thus able to continue. A 'special effort was made' according to the 1971 Annual Report to 'improve the collection on Persia'. The Leverhulme Trust funding between 1966 and 1972 had a crucial role in helping to establish the Archive. Apart from providing finances for the printing of leaflets, an exhibition and money for transport of papers the main benefit was in

providing desperately needed administrative help in funding a succession of part time archivists. As already noted Mrs Hilary Bullard was the first part time archivist and research assistant. She served from January 1966 to July 1968 when Mrs Rajika Puri, a graduate of Delhi University, took over until the summer of 1969. Miss Jo Kadera was then part time archivist from September 1969 to June 1971 followed by Miss Lee Frank. By 1972 the Private Papers Collection had acquired a substantial body of papers and photographs and an increasing international reputation amongst scholars. Lord Murray of the Leverhulme Trust could with satisfaction write in 1972 that ‘the growing use of your collection is splendid and it is clear that such help as the Leverhulme Trust has been able to give has been well used and well worthwhile.’ However the future of the Archive was uncertain. Leverhulme Trust funding had come to an end at the same time as Elizabeth Monroe’s retirement.

#### Sarah Graham Brown and Diana Grimwood-Jones: 1972-1979

The Report for 1972 on the Private Papers Collection noted that the Leverhulme Grant ‘is now exhausted’ and ‘the collection has been amalgamated with the Library of the Middle East Centre under the general supervision of its Librarian, Dr. Derek Hopwood’. With regard to funding ‘the Middle East Centre has agreed to finance a part-time post on a temporary basis for the present year only while permanent sources of finance are being sought’. The words ‘temporary basis’ and ‘for the present year only’ underline the unease at committing to long term funding. The report noted the retirement of Elizabeth Monroe and that as ‘an emeritus fellow of the College she continues to take an interest in adding to the collection’ although the ‘day to day work of servicing enquiries and indexing material is being done part-time by Miss Sarah Graham Brown.’ Miss Sarah Graham Brown served in the Archive from 1972 to June 1974.

Funding was found in the form of a three year grant from the Government of Kuwait starting in 1972. Miss Diana Grimwood-Jones was appointed as librarian and private papers assistant in July 1974 and she served until 1979. The Archive during this period saw a steady rise in the number of researchers visiting, reaching 59 visitors in the academic year 1977-1978. Miss Grimwood-Jones also according to the MEC Annual Report of 1977-1978, produced the ‘first handlist to the Private Papers Collection’ giving a ‘brief description of the 209 named collections received up to 31 July 1977’. This was published along with a microfiche of the card index of the location of Archives begun by Elizabeth Monroe in 1979 as *Sources for the history of the British in the Middle East 1800-1978* (London: Mansell 1979).

Publishing the card index was a major achievement. Work on collating the index so it could be made into a publishable form had begun in 1971. Elizabeth Monroe had wrote of the card index in her Report for 1968 that ‘all users pay it tribute as the only existing index of its kind on its

subject' but 'we have not yet had time to make it available in Photostat to our fellow centres at SOAS and Durham. To do this for them and perhaps to sell copies to certain interested centres overseas is still our aim'. The card index was of course part of the original project that had sprung from Elizabeth Monroe's research for *Britain's moment in the Middle East 1914-1956*. Apart from its obvious utility in helping researchers locate papers it was also a symbol and means of co-operation between Archival institutions. For as the 1966 leaflet noted 'when a man's papers extend to more than one region, they are stored at a single point, but indexed at more than one'. Its purpose was, according to Diana Grimwood-Jones' 1978 article on the Archive, ambitiously to serve 'as a union list of Middle East Private papers for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'.

The tradition of co-operation with other Archival institutions and projects continued in the 1970s with support being given to the Historical Records Project survey of the papers of 20<sup>th</sup> Century British politicians and the work of the Anglo-Palestine Archives Project which culminated in the publication of Philip Jones' book *Britain and Palestine 1914-1948*.

Despite expectations that new accessions would cease the Archive saw accessions remain constant at around 14 or 15 collections a year with two very busy years in 1973-1974 which saw 32 accessions and 1977-1978 which saw 23 accessions. By comparison the figures for new accessions from 1966-1971 were 37, 32, 31, 21, 24 and 19 accessions. The boost in new accessions in 1977-1978 was partly due to the work of the Anglo-Palestine Archives Project through which, as the MEC Annual Report for 1977-1978 noted, the 'bulk of items relating to Palestine' were obtained. The Archive also saw some significant and large accessions in the form of the St John Philby Collection in 1972 and the Jerusalem and East Mission Collection in 1975-1978 which is still the Archive's largest collection at over 165 boxes and 23 volumes.

The Archive also underwent the move in 1978 from 137 Banbury Road to 68 Woodstock Road with the rest of the Middle East Centre. The Annual Report for 1978-1979 notes that 'despite the closure of the Centre for some months owing to the move, 44 readers used the collection.'

Diana Grimwood-Jones post as Librarian and Archivist unfortunately came to an end in 1979 as the 1977-1983 College Record noted 'with the termination of financial support from Kuwait'. The 1970s had however seen the further establishment of the Archive in terms of increasing numbers of researchers visiting and in continual new accessions.

#### Gillian Grant 1980-1989

Efforts to find a new source of funding were successful and a two year British Library Research and Development Division Grant enabled the employment of Mrs Gillian Grant in January 1980. The purpose of the grant was, as the 1977-1983 College Record noted, 'to support an

archivist for the Private Papers Collection and to finance the conservation and development of the archives'. For the first time the Archive was to have a full time professionally trained Archivist.

The work accomplished by Gillian Grant in her first two years of service in the Archive was impressive. Substantial work was carried out in creating more detailed catalogues for collections which had only been sketchily catalogued previously. For example her 1981 Report lists 9 collections totalling over 58 boxes for which detailed catalogues were created. Added to this 8 photographic collections with over 3488 items had not only had been catalogued but also indexed by place-name, personal name and subject.

The brief to carry out conservation work on the collection had also been taken seriously in the cleaning and repackaging in Archival boxes, files and envelopes of 8 paper collections totalling 34 boxes and 6 photographic collections with 1797 items. All 110 photograph albums in the collection had also been inter-leaved with acid free paper and a copying programme had commenced to make copy negatives and contact sheets of the Archive's loose print collection. The progress on this for 1981 was 2,500 prints copied to 35mm film and 74 contact sheets which 'has reduced the handling of original prints to a minimum'. Gillian Grant had also started the search for a publisher to publish a catalogue of the photographic collection and an 'exhibition of photographs of Iraq' was to open at the Iraqi Cultural Centre in March 1982.

Added to this work the reading room must have been busy as according to the Archive's Annual Reports the collection was used on 193 occasions in 1981 and 252 occasions in 1982. Gillian Grant was also searching for funding so the 'services of an archivist can be retained once the British Library grant runs out. We have, however, received no response to our appeals so far'. In 1982 'great efforts' were made 'to find further funds for the collection, and this has taken up a good deal of the archivist's time'. This time the search was successful as the 1982 Annual Report records that the Archive received 'a grant of £10,000 from the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research in Amman' which has 'entailed the preparation of an exhibition of 100 photographs of Jordan' to open in Amman in Spring 1983. The Archive also received a £2000 grant from the Documentation Centre in Abu Dhabi. These grants supported the Archive until January 1984. Further funding was found, as the 1983-1985 College Record notes, in 'a generous grant from Mid Orient Technical Services, London' and 'during the period 1985-88' in the form of 'generous grants from Sayyid Mahdi al-Tajir and the National Commercial Bank of Saudi Arabia.'

Despite the precarious and time consuming nature of searching for ad hoc funding Gillian Grant's service in the 1980s was marked by impressive work on the photographic collection. As already noted substantial work was carried out in cataloguing, indexing and making copy negatives and contact sheets for the photographic collection. Gillian Grant also worked on several large photographic exhibitions. Exhibitions during the 1980s included as already noted the exhibition of

photographs of Iraq held at the Iraqi Cultural Centre in March 1982, the exhibition of photographs of Jordan held in Amman in 1983 entitled 'The Life and Times of King Abdullah of Jordan 1882-1951'. In addition to these an exhibition on the Arab Revolt was held at the Ashmolean Museum and visited by Prince Charles and Prince Hassan of Jordan in the spring of 1980 and an exhibition of 19<sup>th</sup> Century photographs of Palestine, Syria, the Lebanon and Egypt was held in Oxford for the 11<sup>th</sup> British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Conference in July 1984. Finally the exhibition 'Images of Istanbul, 1829-1988' which was opened by the Turkish Ambassador was held at Halifax House in South Parks Road, Oxford in September 1988.

Efforts to publish a catalogue and microfiche of a selection of 16,000 photographs also came to fruition with the publication of *Historical Photographs of the Middle East* by Inter-Documentation Company of Leiden in 1985. The same company also microfiched a selection of the Jerusalem and East Mission Collection which was published in 1990.

Gillian Grant's most ambitious work during this period however was a national survey of Middle East photographic collections. The three years of survey work culminated in the publication of *Middle Eastern Photographic Collections in the United Kingdom* published by the Middle East Libraries Committee in 1989.

When Gillian Grant resigned as Archivist in 1989 the College Record could with justification write of 'her devoted service' in which she 'had gained a unique knowledge of the photographic collection...'

#### Search for Funding 1990-1996

With the loss of Gillian Grant and a lack of funding the Archive entered a difficult period in the early 1990s. The Middle East Centre Annual Report for 1989-1990 noted Gillian Grant's devoted service but added 'unfortunately, there are no funds to replace her full-time and as a substitute Diane Ring will supervise the collection which will be open on Tuesdays and Wednesdays'. The Archive thus entered a period of part time opening under the supervision by the Middle East Centre Librarian with the help of a graduate student. From 1991 to 1992 the graduate student was Ms Floresca Karanasou. The cut in opening hours to two days a week inevitably led to lower visitor numbers. From receiving around 200 researchers a year the number of visits dropped to 79 visits in 1992 and then 95, 106, 152 and 135 from 1993 to 1996.

On the positive side the Archive was moved in the summer of 1990 from 68 Woodstock Road to its present location in the Middle East Centre Annex. Apart from providing more space and security with a dedicated Archive storage area the Archive now had its own reading room rather than sharing facilities with the Library.

Despite the lack of staff in the Archive the Middle East Centre, with the hard work of Derek Hopwood, was able to bring to completion a project to microfiche the 46 photograph albums in the Freya Stark Collection. The catalogue and microfiche were produced and published by Inter-Documentation Company of Leiden in 1996 as the Freya Stark Photograph Collection.

A project to collect papers relating to Oman was also started in 1994. As the 1994 College Record notes 'Ian Skeet, a consultant at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, has been instrumental in setting up, as a separate collection, *The Oman Archive* which consists of papers and other material donated by men and women who have served in Oman. So far papers have been received from or through the following: Julian Paxton (Shell); F.M. Partington; Mr & Mrs Searle; Malcolm Stathers; Ronald Bailey; Michael Rice; Rudolf Jackli.' Due to this work in the 1990s the Archive now has excellent holdings for Oman, especially for military history in the 1970s.

However the new accessions would remain uncatalogued and thus inaccessible without the work of an Archivist. Opening for two days per week was also a painfully short amount of time to offer access to the Archive. The search for funding came to a successful conclusion in an application to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) as part of their 'Non-formula funding of specialized research collections in the humanities' in 1996.

#### Clare Brown 1996-2000

As a result of HEFCE funding the College was able to employ Clare Brown on the 6<sup>th</sup> May 1996 to be full time archivist at the Middle East Centre. This would bring relief to researchers in the resumption of 5 day opening and the recommencement of cataloguing of an increasing backlog of new accessions. However the invention of new technology, especially in the development of the Internet, meant that this was a period of great opportunity for the development of increased access to the Archive. As the 1996 College Record noted 'the aim is to put the collection on to online-public access and to cooperate closely with similar collections such as the Sudan Archive in Durham.'

To this end the Guide to the Private Papers Collection which had originally been published in 1979 was updated, expanded in detail and put online in June/July 1998. A webpage about the Archive was created giving information such as opening hours, access, contact details for enquiries, costs for copying and of course the updated Guide. Substantial work was also carried out by Clare Brown in creating Collection level descriptions for all the Archive's paper collections using the new cataloguing standard ISAD (G). The benefits of having a webpage with an online Guide were considerable, especially considering the Archive's international user base. Researchers could consult the Guide online and thus come better prepared to start their research with a good idea of what collections they would need to consult. Researchers also benefited greatly, as the 1998 College

Record noted from having a dedicated professional Archivist who could 'provide resource support for overseas students, especially those using the collections on a long-term basis' which entailed 'advice on collections held elsewhere, the use of specialist reference material, and assistance with palaeographical queries'.

With new funding the core work of the Archive in preservation and conservation could also be considerably enhanced. Numerous paper collections were re-boxed and re-folded in acid free Archival boxes and western manuscript folders and a project to humidify, repair and flatten sixty five rolled maps was brought to completion by a professional conservator in 1999. The storage facilities of the Archive were also significantly improved and expanded by the installation of brand new mobile shelving in January 1998. This gave the Archive an increase of 74 meters of new shelving. New statistics on the use of the collection were also started in September 1996 in the form of order slips that researchers filled out to request material. Data could thus be compiled on what parts of the Archive were most heavily used and that should thus be a higher priority for conservation or particularly worthy of outside funding.

The core work of the Archive in providing research access to the collection was also being met with the number of visits by researchers returning to 1980s levels and even surpassing them, with an impressive 317 visits to the Archive recorded in the 1998 College Record.

The pressing need to find funding however returned to hinder the work of the Archive. HEFCE funding came to end in 1999. Before this date numerous funding bids had been submitted to various bodies including one that exemplified the Archive's continued tradition of co-operation with other Archival institutions. This was a bid to the Research Support Libraries Programme for 'Missionary Collections in the UK: a project to facilitate and improve access'. The project was led by SOAS and included not only St Antony's College but also Rhodes House Library, and the Universities of Edinburgh and Birmingham. Despite being given an excellent rating the bid was unsuccessful. However the Archive was able to continue its work into 2000 due to the 'gracious generosity of H.H. Shaikh Sultan bin Muhammed al-Qasimi, the Ruler of Sharjah' (College Record 2000).

The Archive also benefited from a generous grant of £5000 from the Anglo-Omani Society to fund the employment of a student archivist for three months to catalogue the Oman Collections. Caroline Hughes was duly employed from the 19<sup>th</sup> June to 15<sup>th</sup> September 2000 and catalogued 12 Oman Collections.

Unfortunately core funding had not been found to support the continued employment of a full time Archivist and so Clare Brown's service in the Archive came to an end in September 2000.

#### Search For Funding 2000-2002

The Archive once again entered a difficult period without funding. The Centre Director, Dr Eugene Rogan opened the collection as noted in the 2001 College Record on an 'ad hoc basis' until in Trinity Term (April) 2001 'Ms Lucie Ryzova joined the Centre as part-time archivist, opening the collection to readers on Thursdays and Fridays'. With the resumption of two day opening there was an inevitable drop in visits of researchers to the Archive with only 120 visits from June 2001 to May 2002.

With the difficult and wearying experience of searching for ad hoc funding in 1990s the need to secure permanent financial support for the Archive was ever more painfully apparent. In 2001 the Middle East Centre 'initiated a series of exchanges with research institutes and universities in Saudi Arabia' in which the Warden and Centre Director were invited to Riyadh to visit the King 'Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives in February 'to discuss the possibility of greater exchange between our institutions'. The Middle East Centre then received a return visit by 'the Director of the Foundation, Dr Fahd al-Semmari, and the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, H.E. Dr Khalid al-Sultan' in March 2001 followed by the 'Minister of Higher Education, H.E. Dr Khalid al-Ankary, and the presidents of five Saudi Universities' (College Record 2001).

The Saudi interest in the Private Papers Collection centred around the St John Philby Collection which had been gifted to the College by Aramco in 1972 in exchange for microfilm copies for Aramco, and a University in Saudi Arabia and America. The St John Philby Collection is important to Saudi history as St John Philby had from 1917 been a close friend of Ibn Saud and a noted explorer of Arabia's formidable deserts. Two of St John Philby's most famous journeys were his crossing of the desert from Riyadh to Taif in 1917 for which he received the Royal Geographical Society's Founder's Medal and his crossing of the Rub al Khali in 1932. St John Philby was also involved in facilitating negotiations for Saudi Arabia's first major oil concessions in 1932-1933. His initial friendship with Ibn Saud has sprung from his role as a representative of the British Government seeking to gain the support of the Arabian desert tribes in order to stop the flow of weapons and supplies to the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. After resigning from his post as Chief British Agent in Transjordan in 1924 Philby went to live in Saudi Arabia working in the import company Sharqieh Ltd that was quaintly titled the 'Company of Explorers and Merchants in the Near and Middle East'. Philby was also a noted author, writing many books about Saudi Arabia and his impressive desert journeys. Philby's papers and photographs thus form a rich resource for the study of Saudi history. However the original microfilm copy of the Philby papers had deteriorated and the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives wished to make the papers more accessible to scholars in Saudi Arabia who might find travel to England difficult.

A co-operation agreement was signed between the College and the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives in November 2001. The focus of the agreement was to provide copies of collections of direct relevance to Saudi history and in particular the St John Philby Collection. In addition, as 2002 College Record notes, 'with the approval of both Aramco who originally gifted the Philby Papers to the College, and the Philby Estate, the Centre presented twenty-six original letters bearing the seal of King 'Abdul 'Aziz to the Riyadh-based foundation that bears his name'. The co-operation agreement also established an annual lecture 'in honour of the founder of Saudi Arabia, King 'Abdul 'Aziz Ibn Saud'. In return the co-operation agreement established a permanent endowment for the Archive. The interest from which provides the salary for a full time professional Archivist and a running budget for the Archive. The long struggle to secure permanent core funding for the Archive had thus been brought to an end.

#### Debbie Usher 2002-

With funding secured the College was able to employ Debbie Usher on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002. The Archive thus once again had a professional full time Archivist. Five day opening of the Archive was resumed. The focus of the Archive's work since 2002 has been in honouring the co-operation agreement with substantial work on improving the catalogue for the Philby Collection and in producing a preservation microfilm of the papers (which can then easily be digitized to reap the benefits of electronic access). The physical condition of the Philby Collection has been considerably improved with conservation work being carried out on individual items by professional conservators and the entire collection repackaged in archival quality acid free boxes and four flap western manuscript folders. The entire Philby photographic collection of over 6000 items has also been copied using high quality archival negatives and work on copying other collections of direct relevance to Saudi history has commenced. The Middle East Centre has also hosted the first three Ibn Saud lectures.

The provision of stable, regular funding for the Archive has considerably enhanced the Archive's ability to fulfil its core mission of preservation and access to the collections in its care. With regard to preservation and conservation the Archive was able in October 2002 to join the Oxford Conservation Consortium. This is a joint venture, which in 2007 includes ten Oxford College as well as The National Trust which all pay an annual subscription to fund a conservation studio and professional conservation staff. The benefits to the Archive have been immense with regular support and advice on preservation and conservation issues including support in funding bids. The subscription also provides access to a set amount of time for conservation work on items selected by the Archivist. The new funding for the Archive has also enabled the purchase of equipment to monitor and record environmental conditions, as well as equipment for digitization

work. The Archive has thus been able to begin work on digitizing some of its photographic collection which not only helps to preserve fragile originals but considerably improves access for researchers.

The good work begun by Clare Brown in developing the online presence and facilities of the Archive has been continued. All of the Archive's catalogues for paper collections have been typed up and are thus available in electronic form. These have been improved by the addition of a standardised collection level description based on Clare Brown's ISAD (G) descriptions. These detailed catalogues have been put online as PDF files. Consequently researchers now not only have a Guide to Archive online but also detailed catalogues for individual collections. Guides to specific countries and to popular subjects such as missionary papers and the Palestine Police have also been created and put online to support researchers in finding collections relevant to their research.

With a view to the importance of online access the Archive's name was formally changed by the MEC Steering Committee in January 2003 from the Private Papers Collection to the Middle East Centre Archive. This is so that the Archive's subject matter and institutional allegiance are more immediately apparent to researchers browsing online networks such as the Mundus Gateway to Missionary Collections (to which the Archive contributed) or the Archon directory and in the future either the Access to Archives or Archives Hub networks.

The Archive's webpage has also been substantially developed with the addition of many new pages for online Guides and catalogues, the advertisement of new accessions and a useful links page to help researchers locate material of relevance to their research in other Archive institutions. The webpage also supports the work of the Archive in collecting papers with an online leaflet for potential donors to the Archive setting out the Archive's history, purpose and collecting policy.

New accessions to the Archive have increased quite markedly, with growth areas in collections relating to Oman and to the British Mandate Palestine Police. In addition to the records of the Palestine Police Old Comrades' Association received in 2002 the Archive has also received former public records in the form of Palestine Police Service Record Cards. Continuing in the Archive's tradition of co-operation with other Archive institutions a joint funding bid with the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum was submitted to the AHRB Resource Enhancement Scheme in November 2004 for project to catalogue the Palestine Police collections and to carry out an oral history project. The bid was unfortunately unsuccessful. However with the limited resources at the Archive's disposal and the kind support of student volunteers from the Middle East Centre the project to interview the fast diminishing number of former British Palestine Policeman commenced in February 2006. The Archive was however successful in gaining a grant from the Council for British Research in the Levant of £9,750 for oral history interviews of former Arab and Jewish

members of the British Mandate Palestine Police who still live in the Middle East using local historians with experience of oral history interviewing.

With such busy endeavours in collecting new papers and photographs, seeing to the long term preservation of collections and supporting researchers with online resources as well as managing a busy reading room Elizabeth Monroe would surely be pleased with the remarkable success of her endeavour started in 1961.