SUDAN STUDIES

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CONTENTS

SUDAN STUDIES SOCIETY OF THE UK

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EDITORIAL

Many of you will have noticed that the heading on the front cover has been changed. It seemed appropriate with the creation of the Republic of South Sudan to point out that the journal will contain material relevant to both Sudan and South Sudan. 2011 was a momentous and difficult year for both countries. Independence for South Sudan has had serious repercussions for the region leaving as it does a whole host of new economic and political circumstances to be addressed. Inevitably, in view of recent past history not all has been plain sailing with so many of the salient points of interaction still unresolved. Sudan has had to come to terms with the fact that much of the oil wealth is to be found in South Sudan, a problem highlighted by the seemingly intractable dispute over the future of Abyei. Furthermore, within its own boundaries, to its existing troubles over Darfur and in the Red Sea has been added unrest in south Kordofan and in southern Blue Nile. South Sudan too has its own internal difficulties with the new government, with very limited resources of trained manpower, trying to restrain the potential inter-ethnic violence that was buried beneath the surface during the campaign for Independence and is now erupting. I am sure that our hope for 2012 is that these two countries will find common ground for a resolution of all these problems both internal and between them.

Many members will have seen references to the passing of **Father Vantini**, the renowned Christian priest who spent his whole working life in the Sudan and was a noted scholar and historian of Christianity in pre-Islamic and modern times and well respected for his work by Moslem as well as Christian scholars. This issue includes an *'Appreciation'* by **Herman Bell**.

For all of us with more recent experience of life in the Sudan it is interesting, and instructive, to learn how earlier Sudan Government servants saw their role. I am pleased that the family of the late

Robert Cecil Mayall CMG, DSO, MC, has given us permission to include in this issue extracts from notes for lectures he gave in Britain, after he retired from **20 years' Sudan Government Service**, on health grounds in 1940. He distinguished himself in the First World War and joined the Sudan Political Service in 1920. For his last four years of service he was Governor of Blue Nile Province. To very many outside the family he was known as Ned, but within the family usually Cecil and never Robert. After service in the Sudan he became the Sudan Government Agent in London until 1951 and finally until 1956 Public Relations Consultant to the Sudan Government in London. Ned Mayall died in 1962. His wording has not been altered.

At the present time there is much strife in the **Nuba Mountains** and so it is with pleasure that we are able to include an account of the life of an Agricultural Officer in this area during the Second World War. Like Ned Mayall before him **Ian Mackie** was invalided out of Sudan Government Service on medical grounds in 1946. It is clear from his book that the experience of working in the Nuba Mountains was the high point of his life and there is little doubt that he understood the Nuba as well as any foreigner from an alien culture could ever hope to do. After his Sudan Service he returned to his native Scotland, and after farming for a while, became deeply involved in Agricultural Education.

Our third main article is by **Peter Elborn** who describes some of his experiences on a **Safari in Northern Sudan in 2011** led by Michael Asher, the well-known desert traveller and the author of many books about the Sudan, including *Khartoum*, Penguin 2006. I think that for Peter it was quite an experience!

Also included is a piece about **Sudan Memorials**. So far Douglas Johnson has identified three, and one of these, included in this issue, is about **Salim Wilson** who, in effect, was a Sudanese missionary to Britain settling in **Scunthorpe**. We look forward to

other ***similar offerings from SSSUK members*** (and others). Please help!

We have printed recently a variety of reminiscences from people who worked in the Sudan during the Condominium and it has been suggested to me that it would be a good thing to have some similar accounts of events from folk who have lived and/or worked in the Sudan in more recent times. The Editor has had the temerity to start this off with an interesting experience just two weeks after he left the Sudan Government Service.

This issue also includes a short piece on **Sudan place names**, book reviews on the revised edition of Douglas Johnson's, *The Root Causes of Sudan's civil wars* and of an autobiographical novel by Leila Aboulela.

The issue concludes with some **SSSUK Notices.**

SUBSCRIPTIONS

May we once again remind members that subscriptions for 2012 were due on 1st January. Please pay – by cheque to the Treasurer, Adrian Thomas (see address inside front cover) or directly to the Society's account:
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Father Giovanni Vantini: In Memoriam

Father Giovanni Vantini spent most of his life as a teacher, priest and scholar in the Sudan. His specialisation was the history, art and archaeology of the Christian church in the Sudan. He is remembered with great affection by his colleagues and students, Muslim and Christian alike.

A distinguished tradition of scholarship on the Christian church in the Sudan had already been developed by Ugo Monneret de Villard (1881-1954) in a number of important studies including *La Nubia Medioevale* and *Storia della Nubia Cristiana*. Father Vantini (1923-2011) made substantial contributions of his own to that tradition. One of his goals was to enrich our understanding of Nubian history with evidence from archaeological expeditions after 1960. He joined the Polish expedition at the cathedral of Faras and published a book on the significance of their dramatic discoveries (1970). Another of his goals was to take full advantage of evidence from sources in Arabic. His *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia* (1975) has been an outstanding resource for Nubian historians.

Father Vantini was born in Villafranca di Verona on 1 January 1923. He was ordained a priest in 1947, trained in Arabic and sent to the Sudan. There he spent 58 years, teaching in schools established by the Comboni missionaries, working in parish churches and St. Matthew's Cathedral (Khartoum) and engaging in journalistic endeavours such as a bi-weekly journal entitled *Assalam [Peace]* which was launched at the time of Sudanese independence in 1956. In 2005, he published *La Missione del Cuore - I comboniani in Sudan nel ventesimo secolo [The Mission of the Heart – The Comboni Missionaries in Sudan in the Twentieth Century]*.

His *Christianity in the Sudan* was published in 1981. In spite of ill health in his final years he managed to achieve a thorough

revision of that book and published it in 2009 as *Rediscovering Christian Nubia*. He died in Verona on the 3rd of May 2011 at the age of 87.

Father Vantini examined the flourishing Christian kingdoms of mediaeval Nubia. He also investigated the extent to which Christianity was present in the Sudan over the past 2000 years. In New Testament times, a Sudanese official accepted the Christian faith on his homeward travels from Jerusalem and was baptized by St. Philip (8th chapter of the Book of Acts). He was the treasurer of the *'Candace'* or reigning queen of Meroë, which is now located in the village and archaeological site of Bajrawīya (16° 56' 18" N, 33° 44' 50" E). Father Vantini found no evidence that his conversion resulted in a Christian congregation in Meroë (2009, 26). Towards the other end of the time scale, active Nubian Christians were attested as late as 1742 on the island of Tangassi opposite Old Dongola (Vantini 2009, 198f.). Father Vantini pondered on the '*Causes for the fall of the Nubian Church'* (2009, 199 f.) and suggested that *'evangelization had been superficial in many parts of the kingdom'* and that '*there had been no mention in the historical records of any institute in Nubia for the training of local clergy'*. Some scholars may wish to construct a counter argument to this point of view with reference to the brilliant artistic and linguistic productions of the Nubian monasteries, such as those of the monastery next to the cathedral of Faras.

Father Vantini's command of Arabic was an essential skill for the production of his *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia* (1975), a companion study to the historical and archaeological work in which he was involved at that time in the Nile Valley. He wrote one of his major publications in Arabic *(1978)*: *Tārīkh al-masīḥīya* [*The History of Christianity in the Old Nubian Kingdoms and the Modern Sudan*]. He provided many details on the transition from Christianity to Islam which can be perceived in terms of loyalties to rulers and loyalties to their faith: *Cuius regio, eius religio.*

In the colloquial Arabic of the Sudan there is a relevant expression of condolence which is widely used: ***al-baraka fiikum*** *'Blessing upon you'*. Death reminds us of the great store of blessing that is available to us all. *'Blessed be those who mourn for they shall be comforted'.*

Father Vantini was a modest and highly motivated scholar. He was also a kind and generous friend. Even though the *Canticle of the Creatures* was composed almost 700 years before his birth by Saint Francis of Assisi, the following verses still seem particularly appropriate:

Altissimu, onnipotente bon Signore,
Tue so le laude la gloria e l'honore
et onne benedictione.
... ...
Laudato si', mi Signore, per sora nostra Morte corporale,
da la quale nullu homo vivente po skappare,
... ...
Laudate et benedicete mi Signore et rengratiate
et serviteli cun grande humilitate.

[Good Lord, most high and almighty,
To thee be praises, glory, honour and all blessings.
... ...
Be praised, my Lord, for our sister bodily death
From whom no human being can escape.
... ...
Praise and bless my Lord; thank Him,
And serve Him with great humility].

Herman Bell

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Some of Father Vantini's publications:

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Further appreciations of Father Vantini may be found online through the following links (accessed 1 December 2011): www.togetherforsudan.org.uk/in_memoriam.aspx and http://www.nigrizia.it/sito/notizie_pagina.aspx?Id=9792

TWENTY YEARS AS A POLITICAL OFFICER IN THE ANGLO-EGYPTIAN SUDAN

Robert Cecil Mayall

After the First World War, with eleven other candidates from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, I was appointed as ADC (Assistant District Commissioner) in the Sudan Political Service. After some 8 years I was appointed a full DC and in 1931 I was appointed Deputy Governor of Kordofan. Two years later I was appointed Deputy Civil Secretary in Khartoum, and in 1936 I was appointed Governor of Blue Nile Province where I served until I was invalided out of the country in 1940.

What follows is a selection by the Editor, approved of by the family, of some of his interesting experiences taken from notes for lectures he made during the Second World War. A full set of the Notes is lodged in the Sudan Archive at Durham University.

ADC in Blue Nile Province, 1921

In February 1921 I left Khartoum on a river paddle steamer for Ed Dueim about 150 miles to the south……. My only memory of my stay here was of the first night. I awoke to find something warm and furry inside my pyjama jacket coat. I remember stroking it in my sleep, but when it began to nip my fingers, I grabbed it tight and threw it hard against the wall….. In the morning I found lying dead, and badly damaged, one of the largest rats I ever saw in the Sudan. Such was my introduction to life in the provinces.

Stationed at Kosti

Here I first took to camel riding. Camel riding is by far the most comfortable form of trekking in the Sudan. A good riding camel is not only the smoothest mount in the world, but provided one has a guide in front, you can comfortably and safely go to sleep as you

ride at some 8 to 10 miles an hour. I was always accompanied by half a dozen native policemen, two of whom carried the Union Jack and the Egyptian flag in front while the remainder in the rear led the slower baggage animals carrying all the….. kit. During the course of my service between 1920 and 1927, before the introduction of motor cars, I must have travelled many thousands of miles by camel, by day and by night….. The one and only disadvantage of camel riding……was constipation and my camel bags always contained a large bottle of Eno's Fruit Salts.

I remember how one day early in 1921 I was warned by telegram from Khartoum that a steamer would shortly be arriving at Kosti with some 30 sons and their families of the late Khalifa Abdullahi (who had ruled the Sudan from 1885 to 1898) who, owing to their intrigues, had been arrested and put on board as political prisoners. My instructions were to board the steamer with a strong police escort and to take the party not less than 50 miles south of Kosti, and to establish them on a site suitable for a village and then to leave them to their own devices…….

[There follows a full account of the work done to found the village and provision it to the next harvest to ensure that these political prisoners were well provided for after he left]. The site chosen was near Jebelein on the east bank of the White Nile about 100 miles south of Kosti. Having slaughtered a bull at the village entrance to invoke Allah's blessing on the settlement and having appointed a headman from amongst the political prisoners, who all swore by the beard of the Prophet that they were now happy and well provided for – as indeed they were – I left by steamer for…..Kosti. When I got there I was greeted by the senior DC who told me that the party, almost to a man, had returned to Kosti ahead of me by land. Apparently, the night after I left the new village, lions had attacked it killing the cattle and sheep and putting such a 'wind up' the Khalifa's sons that they had covered the 100 miles to Kosti on

foot in record time. My first attempt at village building had not been an unqualified success!!!

Another little incident in the same area comes to mind. I was told by the senior DC to go down by steamer to Jebelein to site and supervise the building of a Government Police Post and Post Office. This I did and a working party of masons, carpenters etc, erected magnificent brick buildings on the site selected by me on the river bank. Unfortunately, in my inexperience, I had not studied the records of the levels of the river and one day some 17 years later (in 1938) when I was Governor of the Province, I received a wire to say that the Government buildings at Jebelein had been submerged and destroyed by the highest Nile on record. Needless to say, I did not tell the DC at Kosti that I had been responsible for the siting of the buildings in 1921!!

One further experience - and a very unpleasant one – from Kosti days. One very clear moonlight night….. I awoke suddenly, with a start feeling that someone was near me. When I came to and sat up I saw standing over my head with a long knife dripping with blood in her hand, a tall black girl absolutely naked. In my semi-conscious state, I thought I had been stabbed. Instinctively and in self defence, I leapt out of bed and threw the girl on the ground, wresting the knife from her hand. When I had tied and trussed her up with my sheets like a chicken, I fetched a lighted candle from the bungalow, and then found that not me, but she, had been stabbed in the breast…… Her husband had come home drunk to their hut, and when she had refused his advances, he had stabbed her with his knife. The girl had disarmed her husband and had run to my compound – as the nearest Government building – for protection.

DC, Upper Nile Province, 1921-23.

To my surprise and delight at the end of 1921 I was given sole charge of a District and just before Christmas I left Kosti to take up my new duties as DC of Renk District.... in area about the size of Scotland. Being in the southern Sudan the inhabitants were a pagan Nilotic tribe....., Dinkas. These....were, and still are, one of the most warlike tribes in the Sudan.....with the Arabs to the north and another pagan tribe, the Shilluk to the south as their traditional enemies.

The worst fight that took place during my days in the District was at Gelhak, 100 miles south of Renk..... The report which I received by a native runner sounded so bad that I rode off ahead of my police escort with only two policemen. After travelling for about 10 hours, the three of us reached Gelhak.....to find that in addition to about a dozen who had been killed and some 70 badly wounded from the Shilluks and Arab traders, the place had been plundered and pillaged by the Dinkas who had obviously attacked in force and then,....had made off into the inland forest.... I and the two bobbies did what we could by burying the dead.....and binding up the wounds of the injured.... I established myself in one of the looted shops, sent one of the bobbies off on his mule to fetch the nearest British doctor and the other to follow the tracks of the vanished Dinka army. After two days I was thankful to welcome the British doctor who arrived on his hospital steamer and was soon operating on the wounded and treating the sick.

A few days later, I was shaving at the entrance to the hut when I suddenly saw coming over the horizon, the bobby on his mule, followed by the most enormous army of Dinkas. So great was the respect of the tribe for the Government and its representative – the local native bobby – that when he had overtaken them in the jungle busily dividing up their ill-gotten spoils, they had on his command followed him back to meet me, and he led them to their trial riding

on his mule with his rifle slung over his back. Any one of those several thousand Dinka could have thrown a spear at him and got away with it, but the prestige of the Government was great..... It took me several days to find out the ringleaders of the attack, but eventually I sentenced a dozen men to terms of imprisonment for periods of 2 to 5 years, and having fined the Dinkas some 200 head of cattle which I handed over to the Shilluks and merchants as compensation, I returned to Renk.

Chief Yol Kur [was] the best friend I ever had in the Sudan, and to whom I owe my life. He stood 6ft 11½ in his naked feet and had over 20 wives and probably scores of children. During my time, he accompanied me for many hundreds of miles on my treks through his tribal area and never by day or by night did he leave me. Once, in 1922 when about 12 days distance from Renk, I got dysentery very badly and became so weak that I could not mount my donkey. Yol used to pick me up like a baby and hold me on my donkey through all those 12 long days to home - a true friend, whom I shall never forget. He may have been naked and a pagan, but he was the type who would never let you down and one of nature's gentlemen.

So much of my life in the Sudan refers to crime and prisoners, that I must say a word on that subject. Probably in no country in the world is there so little crime and I am certain that nowhere else on the whole are the prisoners such forgiving and likeable people. Throughout my service, prisoners usually became my best friends..... [and were keen for people to know that they had been in prison and could tell the time]. I remember once sitting at sunset at the Rest House in Kodok, which lay inland about a mile from the river bank, noticing that the prison bell tolled out 5 o'clock. This was the daily signal for all the parties of prisoners out working on the roads or on the river bank to return under their armed escorts to the prison for their evening meal and to be locked up for the night. About half an hour after the bell had chimed, I

saw a crowd of prisoners approaching me and I noticed that they were carrying four rifles, but not a sign was there of the uniformed police escort who should have been in charge of them. My first idea was that they must have done their escort in, disarmed them and probably now had evil intentions towards me. Then one of them stepped forward, and explained they were in a quandary. He said that as it had been very hot, their four police guards had gone off about 3pm to the beer shops for a drink, leaving their rifles behind in their charge and promising to be back before 5pm. When the bell tolled five o'clock they did not know what to do as the escort had not returned. They held a pow-pow as to what they should do. They dare not go to the prison taking the rifles, as they thought that the native police Sergeant would not believe their story. On the other hand, they didn't like to leave the rifles on the river bank, as they feared they might be stolen by passers-by and then they would be blamed. At last, they believed it was best to come to the 'white man' who might believe their story. The idea of escape had never entered their minds. I had great pleasure the next day in giving each of the four bobbies a month's 'jug' and decreasing the sentence of the prisoners by the same amount.

DC in Kordofan, 1923 to 1931

I now come to the happiest years of my Sudan life. I was transferred from the Upper Nile Province..... and appointed as DC of Western Kordofan, one of the largest Districts in the Sudan. Little did I think when I first covered the long 140 miles from rail head at El Obeid to my District Headquaters at El Nahud, that I was going there for over 8 years and that when I finally left the District, a journey which had taken me 7 days by camel would be covered in my car in only 3 hours.

The principal natural feature of the District was water supply, or rather lack of it. Apart from a few well centres like Nahud, El Odaiya, Abu Zabad and Muglad there were very few wells in the

area..... In the dry season which lasted from November to July the only water supply available...., apart from that in the few well centres, was rain water stored in large *tebeldi* (baobab) trees. These *tebeldis* were the most treasured possession of the Hamar [tribe], and many were the ownership disputes on which I had to adjudicate. The people used to dig out a hollow depression round the bottom of the trunk of the tree to hold the water as the tropical rain came down and then hollowed out the trunks of the tree so as to pour water into them for storage. The trees were very old and the big ones would store many thousands of gallons....for the dry months. Never did I hear of a case of water being stolen from them.

For the first 4 years of my service in Western Sudan, all my touring was done by camel, but in 1927 I got my first car – an old fashioned T Ford model.... Many a time, having started out in 'Lizzie' have I finished my journey on camel, pony or my feet, and many hours have I spent pushing 'Lizzie' through the sand.

During the rains [of 1926 in En Nahud] while I was sitting in my mud brick house with some visitors playing bridge, a policeman rushed into say that there had been a cloud burst and that the Government offices, the prison and market.....made of mud had all disappeared and everything human and animal in the town had been swept away..... We had not gone more than a dozen steps from the compound before we found ourselves in water above our waists, and where previously the offices and prison had been was just a mound of slimy mud rubble. When dawn came, I went out and viewed the ruins. Nothing was left of the offices and all the furniture, files etc were gone. Sitting, however, on a high mound, was a large group of natives. These were the prisoners, whose gaol had disappeared and who could easily have escaped, waiting patiently to be taken into custody again.... Fortunately, the telegraph office had been sited on high ground and so I sat down and composed a two page wire to the Governor in El Obeid, telling

him of the tragedy and asking for financial and other help to put things right.

And now the El Fasher road murder. One morning I had left En Nahud about 4am on a three weeks' tour by car. After I had gone about 20 miles, and dawn was just breaking, I called a halt to pour water into the radiators. While the drivers were doing this, I walked ahead and told them to come after me and pick me up on the track. After I had walked about a mile, I saw what I thought were three white men asleep under a tree just a few yards from the track. I should have passed them by, but I suddenly heard a slight moan. I went up to the three figures and found they were the bodies of three men, two of whom were stone dead – their throats had been cut from ear to ear, but the third man although badly wounded was still alive. Fortunately, the cars soon caught me up and I tied up the wound of the living man and gave him a big tot of whisky which was the only stimulant I had with me. After a few moments he revived and began to mutter. His story was this. He was a merchant from El Fasher and he had just been on foot to El Obeid, a distance of some 400 miles, accompanied by his two servants to sell some native tobacco. He had sold it in El Obeid for £60 in silver and was on his way back to El Fasher and on his way he had spent a few days in En Nahud. I asked him if he could give me any clue to his assailants, but he said that he had been born blind and therefore could not describe them or the people he had stayed with in En Nahud. He said, however, that while lying under the tree he had heard the voices of four men, just before he and his servants had been attacked and that if he ever heard those voices again he would recognize them. He also knew the name of the street in En Nahud in which he had stayed, and so having buried the two dead servants and put the blind man on a lorry to go back to hospital in En Nahud, I started my investigations into the crime. With my police escort I followed the tracks in the sand and sure enough we found near the tree the recent tracks of four men coming from the direction of En Nahud and the same four men's

tracks returning towards En Nahud. Unfortunately, the tracks were soon lost....on the motor track, but they had corroborated the old blind man's story. I then 'drew a bow at a venture' and surmised that the murderers might possibly be from the people with whom the blind man had stayed... I therefore sent back word to En Nahud to the police officer that every man who lived in the street where the old man had stayed was to be arrested on suspicion and questioned about the crime. I then continued my trek, but cut it short and returned to En Nahud about 10 days later. The blind man I found was better, but still in hospital, and about 170 men were still detained in prison on suspicion and without a charge having been laid against them. Thank goodness *habeas corpus* did not run in En Nahud!!

When the blind man was sufficiently well, I had the 170 men paraded in four different batches, and walking the blind man slowly along in front of each party I made each prisoner speak in turn. The old man without hesitation picked out four voices, as being the voices of the men.... who had murdered his servants, robbed him of his £60 and left him on the road wounded. I held three similar identification parades on three successive days, putting the four suspected men in different batches each time. On all three parades the blind man identified without hesitation the same four men. While as yet I had insufficient evidence on which to charge the four suspects, I felt I could release the other 166 prisoners..... For some weeks I could get no further evidence... [so] one day I put a party of bobbies on to break down their grass houses and to dig up the sand in their compounds..... After several days we found the £60 and also several other personal effects hidden in pots and pans belonging to the four suspected men. On this circumstantial evidence, coupled with the blind man's evidence, I charged the four men with murder. I tried them, found them guilty and sentenced then to be hanged, and before they left En Nahud for El Obeid for their execution, each one of the four had voluntarily confessed to his share in the robbery and murder.

One Wednesday morning as I was sitting in my mud office at En Nahud....a little Greek grocer very dishevelled, unshaven and tattered, burst into the room. I knew him by sight as he was the local grocer at Muglad, in the Baggara part of the district, about 140 miles south of En Nahud..... The Baggara tribe around Muglad has always been somewhat anti-government and had tried previously to shoot up their DC and sack the little market there. He said that on the previous Monday word had reached Muglad that the tribe, thinking that the Government had made them pay too high taxes and that the Greek merchant had been charging too high prices for his wares, had decided that the following Friday, which was market day, to attack the Government post and burn it down, murder the Greek grocer and his relatives and loot his shop. I thought the story was probably untrue or at best exaggerated, but knowing the history of the tribe I could not afford to take any chances as I had only a dozen police at Muglad. And I knew that the Baggara could mass some 5,000 spears and a good few Remington rifles. To-day was Wednesday and the attack was timed for Friday, so I collected two lorries and put 30 police and as many rounds of ammunition I could find into them and having told my ADC to send a telegram to El Obeid giving the gist of the Greek's report and asking for a military patrol to follow me, set off for Muglad. I got to near Muglad just before sunset on Wednesday but decided that it would be tactically unsound to go into the village in the dark in case the Baggara had put forward their zero hour and had already taken the Government post by assault.

At dawn the next morning I sent some bobbies forward as scouts and they came back to say that the Government post and the shops in the market appeared untouched but that rifles were pointing out of every window in the Post.... [They turned out to be] those of the bobbies of the police garrison. The corporal in charge, who I feel sure would never have surrendered that post to the Baggara, was overjoyed at our arrival.....and confirmed the Greek grocer's

story.... Would the military patrol that I wired for arrive in time? About 3pm one of the scouts I had sent out came back and said that he had heard the sound of cars and sure enough, hardly had he spoken than six large Thorneycroft lorries drew up at the Government Post. I greeted the British officer almost with kisses. Here were 100 soldiers of the Sudan Defence Force with rifles and 6 machine guns and an enormous number of wooden cases presumably of ammunition.... My head boy came up to me and said, many of those cases aren't ammunition, they are *'Amstel'*. Sure enough most of them were glorious beer..... This was the British officer's particular taste.... The major and I exchanged 'cases' and the name *'Amstel'* became the official title of this bloodless patrol.

The major and I held a pow-wow and made our dispositions to meet the attack next morning. The Major agreed that his troops should not open fire until I had tried every form of peaceful means. I sent out some Arab friendlies that night to make contact with the tribe and to tell them that the military with machine guns had arrived but if the sheikhs would come into the Government post in the morning unarmed, I would enquire into their grievances about high taxation and high prices charged by the Greek grocer. I added, however, that if the tribe advanced towards the post with their spears, they must take the consequences as the troops would open fire..... Soon after dawn the friendlies told me that 6 sheikhs were coming to see me. I met them at the entrance to the village and told them that I could discuss their grievances but not until the whole tribe unarmed came into the village square. I gave them my word that not a man should be harmed, but I thought I had to teach them not to take the law into their own hands.

While the sheikhs went back to the tribe I made arrangements for a fire demonstration which I thought would show the Arabs what would happen to them if they ever tried to defy the Government. At one end of the village square we put 12 large earthen jars,

painted white, against a parapet. About 5,000 horsemen came galloping into the village, yelling their tribal war cries, but all unarmed. The bobbies halted them and formed them up in a semi-circle where they could watch the effect of machine gun fire on the earthen jars. I then stood up on a box in the centre of the crowd and through a megaphone told them that when I blew my whistle, the m/g teams would run out of the Government post and by their fire destroy the jars, just as they would destroy Arabs who might defy the Government..... I blew my whistle. In an atmosphere of silence and expectation out rushed the six m/g teams and at a range of some 600 to 700 yards loosed off their guns. Not a jar fell or broke!! Never have I been so frightened, as often in Sudan history have Arab leaders told their followers that they have the power to turn Government bullets into water. Either the major had overestimated the marksmanship of his soldiers or the *'Amstel'* had been more potent than I thought.

I joined the major and told him that he must make his m/g teams do the demonstration again and this time there must be no failure, as if one single earthen jar was left his and my number would be up. He agreed to reduce his range to 200 yards to make sure of the show. I mounted the box again and had I think, one of the few inspirations of my life. Through my megaphone I shouted out my warning: *"The Government"*, I said, *"is merciful and never sheds blood until it has given one last warning to people who defy it. Now"*, I went on, *"you have witnessed the last warning"*. When I had withdrawn to the flank again, anxiously I blew my whistle. Out rushed the six m/g teams. At a range of 200 yards the m/gs blew the 12 earthen jars to smithereens and the tribe yelled with delight. I should add that the grievances of the Arabs were redressed before we left Muglad and never again, since the *'Amstel'* Patrol left for El Obeid, have the Baggara threatened violence to the Government Post and market in Muglad.

Ned and Polly Mayall, 1931

Married Life

I got married in 1929. My friends in Nahud had not forgotten, but the phraseology of good wishes caused us to blush. *'Happy greetings, may Allah bless you with many children'* was the message from Munim [Nazir of the Hamar tribe] and there were many similar ones from other African friends. I must tell you a story told to me by my wife. When she was in a nursing home in England in 1931, the news reached En Nahud that we had a daughter, she received a cable from the chief merchant in En Nahud which read, *'Congratulations, May Allah give you a boy child soon'!!* One incident occurred on our first trek together after arrival back from leave in 1929. I remember that we had a thick *ful sudani* [peanut] soup for dinner and I noticed that my wife was dallying with her plateful. I said that I hoped she did not dislike the taste, since....we should probably have that selfsame soup every night for the next fourteen years of our married life. She....ate up every mouthful of the soup, but obviously with some difficulty and little relish. Some weeks later...I was drinking my sun-down whisky and soda when a particularly loathsome little insect known as the 'stink bug' found it way into my drink. When I took up the glass and tasted the whisky and soda, I hurled the contents of the glass across the compound. My wife asked what was the matter and I passed the glass to her so that she could see how a 'stink bug' could make even the best of drinks undrinkable. My wife tasting the last few drops left in the tumbler, said, *"Ah! That is the same taste as I found in the soup our first night when we dined together in the open on our way to En Nahud from El Obeid"*. I then understood why she hadn't taken at once to *ful sudani* soup!!

Deputy Governor, Kordofan, 1931-1933

I suppose I ought to have felt happy....but I wasn't. I felt miserable: I missed En Nahud, the Hamar and my days in the open on camel and car, visiting the people in their villages. My new job

was an office chair from 9am to 2pm and back again in the evening.

One anecdote about life in El Obeid. The British community in El Obeid decided that the time had come when we ought to have a Church. Previously, when padres had visited from Khartoum, services had been held either on the Club verandah or in the Governor's drawing room. We subscribed the necessary funds and built a small church... On the day for consecration....by Bishop Gwynne.....the British community met together to choose a name for the church. Out of the total number present about half were Scots.....and they all voted for St Andrew.....while the rest eventually agreed to vote for St Peter. The Bishop announced....after the votes had been counted that St Peter had defeated St Andrew by one vote.

When.....it was time for the service the Bishop said that he wanted someone to act as his chaplain to carry his Bishop's Crook before him. As I was a parson's son I was detailed for the job and the Bishop dressed me up in his long black cassock and handed me the Crook. When we got to the door of the church.....I had to knock on the door with the crook and demand admission for the Bishop. I did so and from inside the Governor replied on behalf of the congregation telling us to enter. Unfortunately, the door being very new jammed, and when the delay became embarrassing the Bishop who was very corpulent, pushed me from behind and said *"shove, Ned, shove"*. The combined weight of the Bishop and myself caused the door to open suddenly, and the Crook, followed by me and Bishop on top made a most undignified entry into the church. The congregation, already unnerved by this incident, were reduced to hysterics when the little boy of the Public Works Engineer called out at the top of his voice, as he saw the procession headed by the Crook advancing up the aisle, *"Look Mummy, Mr Mayall is going fishing in his dressing gown!!"*.

Deputy Civil Secretary, 1934-36

If I had felt remote and far removed from the Sudanese in El Obeid, I was soon to feel more so as I was transferred at the beginning of 1934 from Kordofan, where I had served for 10 years, to Khartoum, 'the hub of the universe', as Deputy Civil Secretary of the Central Government....

Perhaps the happiest days I had during my two and a half years in Khartoum were when a party of Sheikhs....came to the capital to be shown the sights. I remember the afternoon they came to tea and it was nearly time for them to go, some of them, old gentlemen aged 70 to 80 who in their own homes ruled over large tribes, were found in the nursery with my little girl who was showing them her clockwork toys, dolls and teddy bears. Their genuine interest was very evident.

Governor, Blue Nile Province, 1936-40

As Governor of BNP may I explain that the British in the Sudan are not there for their own profit, but in the interest of the Sudanese by preparing them for the time when they can rule their own country.This aim of British policy is being gradually achieved by the development of what is good in Sudanese tradition, life and culture, and by offering to the Sudanese what we consider good and sound from Western civilisation. Thus, we will hope that in time a Sudanese nation will emerge nurtured and educated on the dual platform of all that is best in East and West..... To what extent we British have up to date succeeded in progessing towards our goal [the reader must decide]. The Sudan of to-day, and even more so the Sudan of to-morrow and the future, will we hope be neither completely Eastern nor entirely Western.... [This] may explain why the Sudan is and will remain for years such an attractive and interesting country to a political officer.

MY LIFE WITH THE NUBA:
a unique people

Ian Mackie

I graduated in Colonial Agriculture in 1941 and was then encouraged to go to Africa to serve as an Agricultural Officer. It appeared that the authorities believed that I could do more for the war effort out there in the Sudan than as a military serviceman. So, in October 1942 I reached the southern frontier of the Sudan. Being wartime, unconventional routes to the Sudan had to be followed. My journey from Scotland by convoy round the Cape of Good Hope, and eventually round Madagascar, took me to Mombasa in Kenya. It was the case now of following the map as best as I could. This led me eventually through Uganda and the Belgian Congo to the southern Sudan border where I arrived on my 22nd birthday. Thereafter, I begged a trip to Khartoum on board a Nile steamer. The whole journey took 4 months.

Ian Mackie, 1945

I spent an initial year on the Gezira plain as an Agricultural Officer on the Abdel Magid Extension to the main Gezira Scheme. This was an Alternative Livelihood Scheme established for the benefit mainly of peasant farmers displaced by the building of the Jebel Aulia Dam. One remit I was given was to establish 40,000 feddans of wheat destined for the allied armies in the North African Desert Campaign. This gave me an opportunity not only to learn Arabic (I passed my Arabic examination from scratch in 15 months) but also to appreciate many of the good things in the local culture and systems of cropping. After a while my Senior Agricultural Officer, Alex Graves, was moved to El Obeid to take charge of the work in the whole of Kordofan Province. I found it a little daunting to be left in charge!

However, after about three months I was transferred to Kordofan following Alex and was appointed Inspector of Agriculture Eastern Jebels stationed at Rashad in the Nuba Mountains, a relatively remote area in those days. Here, the population was rather mixed, comprising mainly of Nuba, but it also included the essentially nomadic Baggara in the north who passed through the Nuba Mountains on their annual trek south, the Hawazma and some of the Negroid peoples of what is now South Sudan. On more than one occasion I was faced by conflict between these different peoples and it must be said that as far as the Nuba were concerned *Pax Britannica,* now sometimes derided, maintained the peace. It has also been my experience that these sometimes labelled 'primitive' peoples put our 'civilised' western society to shame in particular in their generosity. My life was once saved by an Arab when a rock fall trapped me. I tried to reward him but he refused to accept any reward saying that his reward was to see me safely down. I also have vivid memories of being helped to cross Khor Abu Habl in flood when I was on my way to El Obeid.

Most of my activity was amongst the Nuba. If my being was of benefit to the people they more than rewarded me by their kindness and generosity. It may be wondered how such poor people can be so generous to a stranger. I can recall very many examples of this. Several times when I was alone in a tent and down with a severe bout of malaria they brought food to me which they could ill-afford and, I can say, cared for me in the best way that they could. Two of my servants were Nuba. Never once did I meet violence or anger among the Nuba. Only once was I ever attacked and that was by a drunken Arab fanatic!

So, to trek for agricultural purposes among the people gave me intimate contact at a time when few Europeans had contacted the Nuba. I shared in the laughter in their homes, often meeting wives and little children. Among the Nuba, men and women share freely in conversation and entertaining visitors. I took part in many of their celebrations such as *sibr* where teenagers of the tribe are subjected to ritual tests to prove their courage before being accepted as tribal elders. This included wrestling, flailing and having their bodies flicked with sharp knife points to establish tribal markings. I also took part in all kinds of celebrations including those surrounding their well-known stick 'fights' and I attended church services with them. In my agricultural work I had much engagement with the various chiefs and elders not only for work but also socially and so I learnt a great deal about their culture. However, can an outsider really understand another very different culture? Nevertheless, I feel that I can record some of the ways in which the Nuba are 'unique' which is the sub-title to this article.

Part of my remit as an agricultural officer was to encourage an expansion in the range of diet by the provision of healthy seeds of tomato and vegetables and the development of citrus gardens. But another side was to encourage mountain cotton growing and production of grain and their transfer by hundreds of camels to the

railway at Er Rahad. One of the dilemmas I faced was the knowledge that the expansion of grain production demanded by the Government, as part of the war effort and to feed folk elsewhere stricken by drought, was becoming a source of serious soil erosion. In many respects these two strands ran counter to each other. In 1944 the Sudan Government published a report by its Soil Conservation Committee which highlighted, among many other things, the problem of soil erosion in the Nuba Mountains caused by the summer rains. Part of the solution was to create barriers across seasonal streams for water storage for irrigation as with the Khor Abu Habl Scheme with which I was closely involved and hafirs (excavated hollows across streams) to store water for dry season use. As part of the policy of improving agriculture I introduced the Nuba to the concept of an Agricultural Show which they found difficult to comprehend at first, but eventually they embraced it as a great social as well as an agricultural event. In those days Nuba agriculture was notable for its terraces where a wide range of crops were grown in part because they felt safer occupying hill top settlement sites rather than relying on the plains where the Baggara in particular would drive their cattle through their cultivations and in earlier times they would have been susceptible to slave raiding.

Another part of my remit was of course to get to know the various other tribal groups beside the Nuba in my district and to identify the areas in which they resided and were considered by them as their *dars*. It is out of this that I feel I can identify some of the Nuba good points which to me make them unique. Perhaps I ought to preface this statement by acknowledging that service with the Nuba was the highlight of my life and has left a lasting imprint with me over the years. In 1946 I was invalided out of Sudan Government service having contracted amoebic dysentery which almost led to my death.

The Nuba were special in their distinctive culture not only as indicated above but also through other features including their huts which were often beautifully decorated. This element, as well as aspects of language, varied from hillside to hillside. Many huts even had a primitive form of central heating by means of a flue going round then out of a chimney. Both sexes were naked, apart from the women who wore a leather thong between the legs. They oiled themselves and seemed to succeed in avoiding parasites.

I found them to be reliable, honest and trustworthy. I never had anything stolen. The women folk in particular loved to rummage through my possessions out of curiosity but never was anything stolen. During the Second World War many Nuba were recruited to the Sudan Defence Force and served with distinction in the campaign against the Italians in Eritrea. Many of them became NCOs and were considered very highly by their British officers. They were noteworthy for their faithfulness towards their employers and for their loyalty. These facets meant that Nuba often held posts of responsibility in numbers well in excess to be expected of the number of Nuba in the country. This was also helped by their intelligence and their willingness to respond quickly to encouragement and education. Though the Nuba cannot be described as particularly warlike they, nevertheless, have proved themselves to be good soldiers, and this begs the question as to why they succumbed in the past to the deprivations brought upon them by slave raiders. Perhaps the brutality of these outsiders and their superior weaponry were the decisive factors taking account of the fact that the Nuba are essentially a peace loving people.

The Nuba were, and still are, a persecuted people quite different in many ways from their neighbours. The attitude of many of the Arab peoples was, and still is, derisory referring to them as *Abd* (slave), in part at least, because of their very dark skin colour and their lack of clothing. On the face of it, the future of the Nuba must

remain uncertain as they are now an isolated group very different from their neighbours, and different from nearly all the other peoples in the new Republic of Sudan.

Readers may like to know that I have written a book about my time in the Sudan, Ian Mackie, ***Trek into Nuba****, Pentland Press, Edinburgh, 1994.*

A SUDAN SAFARI, JANUARY 14 -28, 2011

Peter Elborn

Sudan gets a rotten press. Years of civil war between north and south, fighting in Darfur, as well as an authoritarian government and allegations of support for terrorists don't make it an obvious tourist destination. Add to this a referendum was to take place to decide whether the south should split and become an independent state. Understandably, people asked me why I was going. Read on and you might find out.

First of all, a word about our leader, Mike (Michael Asher). Ex-paratrooper, ex-SAS, lived for 3 years with a Sudanese tribe in the desert, spent 9 months with his wife crossing the Sahara from west to east with nothing but 2 camels, writer of travel books, biographies and fiction, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Tough guy. Puts on Sudanese dress and looks like a 'local'. Speaks various dialects of Sudanese Arabic, and so on. So, clearly he was the leader and we were just the rest.

And who were the rest? At 65 I should have been the oldest, but no, there was Jo from California, a woman of 81, Jenny from Scotland aged 74, Rosalie at 72 from Arizona and we made up the older group. Next came a middle aged couple, half Lebanese, half German, living in Kenya and parents to Miriam. The young group included Hassoon from Korea, who spoke hardly any English, and all the others were based in Kenya: Miriam, her boyfriend called improbably Squack (to rhyme with quack), a tour agency operator called Guy who had put the Kenyan group together, Toby, a friend of his, airplane crop sprayer by profession and party person by nature, and Lulu who lived up to her name and had run the food and beverage side of a tented hotel in the wilds of southern Sudan. Other than being white Kenyans, the Kenyans were OK. The Korean was impenetrable, the Americans talkative, and Jenny – well at least

I knew what to expect as she had been on the Moroccan camel trek I had been on a year or so ago – let's just say she is camel mad.

So what did we do? A plus for me was to start by staying at the Acropole Hotel in Khartoum for 2 days and returning there at the end of the trek (a favourite hotel of mine from visiting Khartoum from Nairobi on business). Run by a Greek-Sudanese family, it has character, and they sort things out for you without fuss or bother (like police registration and permission to travel). From outside it doesn't look much (in fact it looks like a bit of a dump), but inside its real strength is its friendliness and that everything works – and they give you delicious ice cream at various odd moments during the day.

The road north of Khartoum taking us to Metemma and the meeting point with the camels was flat and, but for the frequent police check points, might have sent us to sleep. Progress at Metemma meant that the promised ferry across the Nile had been replaced with a bridge and soon we found our 21 camels, 5 camel men and a cook waiting for us in some sandy scrub.

The virtue of these men, according to Mike, was their authenticity, meaning – among other things - they were not used to packing tourists' stuff on camels and it took longer than expected. Meanwhile, Mike gave us a camel riding lesson. Most of it is easy – pull right to go right, pull left to go left, pull towards you stop, and otherwise let the camel follow the others – except, yes, how do you get on and off? Now that is not so easy. Getting on: stand on the left side of the camel, put your left hand on the front of the saddle, raise your right leg up high (and I mean very high), then swing your right leg quickly over the saddle with enough momentum to bring your backside down onto the saddle. Yes, but the moment most camels feel you start this procedure, they start to get up and – perhaps for the only time in their miserable lives – this they do very quickly. And camels get up by lurching violently forward, then

backwards, then forward again, and finally backwards. In other words it seems as if they are trying to throw you off.

And getting off? Remember camels are tall – the saddle is well over 2 metres off the ground. The technique is easy to learn: pull the rope you have been using as a steering wheel sharply towards you and at the same time hiss aggressively three times. Well, there must be differences between a Sudanese hiss and ours, because mostly the camels took no notice and didn't sit down. So there was nothing for it but to accept the humiliation of asking for a camel man to come and help: *"Please can you get me down?"* Then the same old back-and-forth lurching and, when the camel is down, slide off to the left.

Oh, and then there's the stick you use to encourage the camel when it strays, or goes slow, or refuses to proceed at all because it has found a tasty bush to eat. Our camels took not a blind bit of notice (but then it was not, as children say, fair because the head camel man had a long studded, vicious looking whip while we had flimsy bits of rubber tubing).

What with waiting for our permits to travel (we also had to have a permit to take photographs), our departure from Khartoum was mid-morning, a 4 hour journey north to Metemma, and the time it took to load the camels, we only had time for an easy 9 kms on the first day. But there was a price to be paid for this easy start – we started with 300 kms to cover in 10 days, so now we had 291 kms to do in 9 days (some 33kms or 20 miles a day) on foot or on camel back.

Where were we going? The Nile flows north to Egypt, but not in a straight line. There is a huge 'question mark shape' bend and we were going to go from the banks of the Nile across the Bayuda Desert to meet up with the Nile again on the other side of the question mark at Korti. In other words, it is a short cut. A short cut that was a ancient caravan route used since Pharaonic times and then used by the British Gordon Relief

Expedition in 1885. Crossing the Bayuda Desert features in Mike's book about Gordon and the relief expedition, (Asher, M, *Khartoum,* Penguin, 2005) and in Winston Churchill's *The River War* when the British returned to Sudan at the end of the century.

If our first walking day was a mere 9 kms, we did not stretch ourselves on the next day – just 21 kms. Mike stops the camel train for a few minutes every hour so we can drink some water and there is the chance to mount a camel or get off and walk. Four one hour marches against a strong sand-filled wind going slightly uphill, then we stopped for lunch, followed by two more hours and that was it. The reason for the short day was so we could camp under trees in the wadi at Abu Tleiha wells, known to the expeditionary force as Abu Klea.

We were going north, the opposite direction to the expeditionary force. For them coming south towards Khartoum, Abu Tleiha was the site of a make or break battle. Arriving near Abu Tlieha they were near exhaustion and out of water. The Mahdi had spotted them and his army was waiting in force. For the British there was no option – to get to water they had to take on and defeat the Mahdi's forces. This they did in what Winston Churchill called *'the bloodiest battle ever fought in the Sudan'.*

We had time to explore the wells - little more than a few holes in the ground, with water perhaps 3 metres below the surface. This was our first well water. Very muddy but, with iodine, supposedly safe to drink, and rather better than we had later on. Mike's view is that water is for drinking, cooking and for the camels – it is not for washing – and as he is the leader, we do what he says.

There are stony graves and a monument to the British dead at Abu Tleiha – or rather to the officers, with '+ 65 men' added almost as an afterthought. Sad, especially as the officers were largely incompetent. The officer responsible for logistics

miscalculated the number of camels needed with the result that the expeditionary force lost the advantage of surprise, while the same officer had 48 camels to carry his champagne!

Until then the terrain had been sandy with some scrub, but now we came to a desert of black broken rocks and much of what followed over the coming week was the same, with just a few patches of sand dunes. Camels dislike rocky surfaces and especially dislike being couched on rock (God knows what it does to their knees!).

Then our first seriously long day: 30 kms over rock until we arrived at some sand dunes, just as the sun was setting, with barely enough time to put up a tent before it was dark. After a short period of dark after sunset the stars came out making an unbelievably bright sky until the almost full moon rose above the horizon, dwarfing the stars. The desert is home to more animals than you would perhaps imagine and that night an owl called many times and, peeking out of the tent I saw, in the light of the moon, mice scampering around.

If that was a seriously long day, the next was more so: 10 and a half hours on the move, the last 2 hours up a steep and very rocky path between high hills, our first bit of travel in the dark, 45 kms in total. I rode the last 2 hour stretch, trusting a camel to get me over the rocks in the dark better than I could have done. Then after an hour of total darkness the full moon came over the hills to light our way magically and provide enough light to erect tents. Just before midnight our cook produced supper and he is worth a word or two.

Improbably called Monti, the cook had provisions for 11 days, mostly vegetables and tinned food, but also eggs that he carried personally on his lap all day long. Monti produced a cooked breakfast at about 7 each morning, then rode for 4 or 5 hours, to arrive at our stopping place for lunch where he first produced hot tea and coffee, followed by a decent cold lunch. Up onto

his camel after clearing up, and after an afternoon on his camel, Monti set up his kitchen once more to produce hot drinks, soup, a cooked main course and fruit for dessert. He finished clearing up well after we were asleep in our tents - or not in our tents. Mike clearly thought it was unnecessary to have a tent and had, he said, never used one in all his days of travelling with the nomads. I used one (most of the others on this trip followed his lead) - except for one night!

Let me explain. Camels are unpleasant creatures. Among other issues, during the night they vomit up what they have eaten and re-chew it noisily. That's not too bad at a distance, but when a camel decided to couch by my tent, rest his massive head on it (less than a metre above my head) and go in for the vomit and chew routine, sleep was impossible. I took my sleeping bag, left the tent and curled up on some sand some distance away. Then I slept.

We had to get to Jakdul on day 5 of the trek. Similarly, the expeditionary force coming the other way had had to get there, though their need was desperate and ours just a matter of itinerary. Jakdul is the half way point across the Bayuda desert, the only open water in the area and the expeditionary force had to find it. There and nowhere else they could water 1000 camels, but it was here that they lost the advantage they had hoped to gain of surprising the Mahdi's forces. Because the Colonel had miscalculated the number of camels, the force had not been able to carry all they needed with them to Jakdul, so the camels were watered, sent back to Korti for further supplies, and the men waited. This 12 day delay was enough to alert the Mahdi's scouts and meant the Mahdi's army was waiting for the expeditionary force at Abu Tleiha. More than a 100 years afterwards the fortifications hurriedly put up by the Expeditionary Force to protect their supply of water are still there.

After looking at Jakdul we set off for another long day, of 30 kms rather than 45, over a flat barren plain, rewarded when we made camp with a glorious sunset. And 30 kms again the following day passing through a landscape of sand and black rock, and towards the end of the day, not long before the sun went down, we came across some nomads who invited us to take tea with them. We didn't, partly because it was late and this was not a suitable place to camp, and partly because some of us felt that such a large group of visitors might put a strain on their hospitality. The flimsy huts in an almost barren setting were absolutely basic, but their friendliness and apparent pleasure at meeting us seemed genuine.

Then another 30 km day, starting at 8 and reaching our camping spot at 6, but with a stop at the Bardallah well where Hassaniyya tribesmen use a pulley and donkeys to draw water from 50m down. This was a hot, brilliantly sunny spot with sand being blown strongly across the landscape. Even in our mess tent the sand was drifting over us.

Two more long days of walking across sandy plains and then we were at the end of the trek with Korti in sight. Our minibus arrived from Khartoum, ready to take us on the next day. It was a cold night and we felt tired after our 300 kms, but for Mike the night was interrupted by a visit from the police who wanted to know what we were doing and needed to be told at the police station an hour or so away. Before we set off from Metemma Mike had been reprimanded by a policeman who complained that Mike had said on a previous visit some years before that he was going into the desert but, the policeman said, *"we came to look for you, but you were not there."*

When we got up at 6-30 the sun was rising and the camels had left, on their way back to Metemma and then Omdurman, where they would be sold and might then end up walking to Cairo to become camel meat. I was not sorry to see them go but it felt a little sad breaking a routine we had followed for 10 days.

The minibus was cramped and we had to stop frequently for police checks. Mike had multiple copies of all our permissions and papers to give at each checkpoint, but at one we were sent back to get a stamp for the driver that had been omitted at the previous police checkpoint. A stop at Al Djem made it all worth while. This is a busy little town on the highway, bustling with life. We stopped to buy some bottled water – a wonderful taste after well water – and sat in a café where *falafel* was being cooked for eager buyers, mostly cheerful students of both sexes. It was all very friendly and relaxed.

We reached the pyramids at Meroe just before sunset and camped behind some massive sand dunes. Scrambling to the top I had a view of the last light over about 20 small pyramids with not a soul in sight. This was my last night in the tent.

I had remembered the pyramids from a visit 7 or 8 years ago, but not remembered the dunes, big, sculptural, of a brilliant almost gold colour, set off by a bright blue sky. Our elderly guide was patient and his brief history useful. The site is dated 300BC to 300AD and each pyramid was the burial place of a king or queen, the entire complex the burial grounds for Old Meroe some distance away where people lived. The burial chambers had carved wall tiles with script and pictures (including the scales of justice) outlining the good deeds of the person buried there. We had the place to ourselves, time to roam and to imagine the processions and ceremonies when the dead monarch was brought from Old Meroe to be buried.

We drove on to Musawwarat as-Sufra 35 kms down a dusty unsurfaced road. Here it was hot, we were tired, unwashed and we struggled to view the site. It had an impressive restored hall, some decorated columns, and a 2 metre high Elephant God. But the real joy was lunch spread out by Monti, who was still with us, under the shade of trees with water flowing in little streams. And then to Khartoum, arriving at the Acropole after

dark where Mike said we should have supper before showering. And, God knows why, some of us did as we were told (the Kenyan lot did not). The food was good, the shower afterwards long, and an impressive quantity of sand was left in the shower tray!

And that was it… except for a walk round a quiet Khartoum on a Friday morning – leafy, sandy, wide streets - a visit to a *suq*, time for packing and, a really special finale, a visit to Omdurman to hear and see the Sufis. On Friday afternoons Sufis gather at the tomb of Sheikh Hamed Al-Nil to chant and dance until sunset prayers. The tomb is in the middle of a bleak, dusty cemetery. Outside the shrine more than 500 people (plus just a few tourists) chanted, people walked around and greeted each other, many dressed in green robes. The chanting grew more and more intense, with some whirling in a trance. It was crowded and wild, and then as the sun set it stopped. We went back for dinner at the hotel and off to the airport for the flight to Frankfurt.

SUDANESE MEMORIALS

Douglas Johnson

Scunthorpe: Salim Charles Wilson

There has been a long association between Sudan and the United Kingdom, and reminders of that association appear in unlikely places. This is the first in what is hoped will become an occasional series which invites members of the SSSUK to contribute their descriptions of monuments, memorials, and locations that commemorate Sudan in the UK.

English missionaries in Sudan are well known, but Sudanese missionaries in England are rare. One such – possibly the only one – was Salim Charles Wilson, a popular non-conformist preacher in the north of England during the early twentieth century. He was born in the 1860s as Hatashil Masha (Machar) Kathish among the Gok Dinka in what is now Lakes state, South Sudan. Some time in the 1870s he was captured by slavers then operating in the Bahr al-Ghazal in a raid in which his father was killed. He was given the Arabic name Salim and kept as a slave by one of the northern merchants but was freed by an Egyptian officer during the Egyptian government's campaign against Sulaiman Zubair in 1879. He was living with other freed slaves in the government encampment of Deim Sulaiman when two CMS missionaries, Charles T. Wilson and Robert Felkin passed through on their way back to England after having been expelled from Buganda, and Salim became Wilson's servant. For a while, he lived with the Wilsons in Pavenham, near Bedford and was baptised as Salim Charles Wilson – combining his slave name with that of his Christian patron – at Holy Trinity Church in Nottingham. He attended Hulme Cliffe College, a missionary training centre, and accompanied the Wilsons to Palestine in 1883, where he met Charles Gordon for the first and only time. On returning to England in 1884 he struck out on his own, touring the north in anti-slavery lectures, working with the YMCA and temperance

societies in London, even attempting missionary enterprises in the Congo and Tripoli before settling in Yorkshire, licensed as a lay reader by the Bishop of Wakefield.

From 1898 on, Salim Wilson earned his living as an evangelist operating mainly in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, earning the nickname *'the Black Evangelist of the North'*. In 1911 he came to Scunthorpe in Lincolnshire as part of the Bethel Free Mission. He came to preach, but then settled, joining the Primitive Methodist Church and marrying his landlady, a widow, Mrs. Eliza Alice Holden, in 1913. The wedding was widely reported in local papers and was even filmed by the local cinema. He remained in Scunthorpe, running a small general store as well preaching until his death in 1946. His death was marked in local papers with the headlines *'Slave Became Preacher. Passing of a Colourful Scunthorpe Figure'*, *'Hatashil Masha Kthish. Slave Boy Who Won a Town's Affection'*, and *'Death of Mr. Salim Wilson. Coloured Preacher and Author'*. Remarkably, surviving relatives of his father's family were located in Sudan to which proceeds from the sale of his property were paid. In Lakes State he is remembered by some as the man who went to England and got education.

For many years after his death Salim Wilson was well remembered in Scunthorpe, articles about him appearing in the local papers at least up into the 1980s. He is buried next to his wife with a head stone identifying him as *'Salim Charles Wilson "the Sudanese"'*. But he left two further memorials in Scunthorpe on Frodingham Road where he built two terrace houses. One, which housed his store, he named *'Kathish Villa'*, after his Dinka name. The next door house he named *'Gordon Villa'*. Both are still standing, with their names engraved in the lintels above their doors.

THE NAMING OF (SUDANESE) MAPS

The Naming of Maps is a difficult matter,
It isn't just one of your holiday games;
You may think at first I'm as mad as a hatter
When I tell you, a map must have THREE DIFFERENT NAMES.

First of all, there's the name that the DCs used daily,
Such as **Wiska** or **Soda**, **Rum-bek, Jebelein**,
Such as **Torit** or **Talodi**, or **Wau** or **Opari** –
All of them sensible everyday names.

There are fancier names if you think they sound flasher,
Some for the zaribas, some for the deims:
Such as **Nordeng**, **Amadi**, **Genawi**, **El Fasher** –
But all of them sensible everyday names.

But I tell you, a map needs a name that's particular,
A name that's peculiar, and more dignified,
Else how can it keep latitude perpendicular,
Or spread out its landsats, or get in its stride?
Of names of this kind, I can give you a quorum,
Such as **Damazin**, **Yambio**, or **Meshra er-Rek**,
Such as **Mesallamiyya**, or else **Abiemnhom** –
Names that never belong to more than one spec.

But above and beyond there's still one name left over,
And that is the name that you *never* will guess;
The name that no *human research* can discover –
But THE MAP ITSELF KNOWS, and will never confess.

When you notice a map in profound meditation,
The reason, I tell you, is always the same:
Its mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation
Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of its name:
Its ineffable effable
Cartografficable
Deep and inscrutable singular Name.

With thanks to T S Eliot as revised by D H Johnson
(two St. Louis boys)

A WELSH MINING COMMUNITY AND OMDURMAN

Jack Davies

In 1960, having finished my contract with Khartoum University, I took up an appointment in the Geography Department at University College of Swansea (now Swansea University). About two weeks after my arrival I was contacted by the Department of Extra-Mural Studies who told me that they had had a most unusual request - for a talk on the Sudan! Someone in the Administration had told them that I had recently come from Sudan, and could I help them? I readily agreed, and so the Workingmen's Club in Gorslas who had made the request was informed and a date was agreed. Gorslas was a mining village some 20 miles from Swansea. (There is no longer any mining in that area). The question in my mind was the same as that in the mind of the Department of Extra-Mural Studies. Why should a workingmen's club in a South Wales mining village want a talk on the Sudan? My wife came with me as moral support, and we went armed with a reasonable number of slides and other bits and pieces. It was a surprising experience; in particular they wanted to know about how the Sudan had changed during the 20th century. It was clear too that there was a genuine interest in Sudanese affairs. All kinds of questions were asked and what was supposed to be a one hour talk lasted two hours. I have given many other talks on various subjects over the years for the College's Department of Extra-Mural Studies but I have to say that this was the most lively, worthwhile and fascinating, with virtually everyone of the 40 odd persons present taking part in the discussion and question and answer session. Needless to say my wife and I were very intrigued about all this.

After the lecture we found out all about it! Quite a few young men from the village had joined the British army towards the end of the 19th century and found themselves taking part in the Anglo-Egyptian Re-conquest of the Sudan. Two elderly gentlemen came

up to us after the session was over to tell us that they had actually fought at the Battle of Omdurman and had been stationed in the Sudan until just after the turn of the 20th century. It was they who had requested the talk, and told us that everyone there that night had either an ancestor who was part of the Re-conquest army or had heard all about the involvement of men from the village from those who had taken part in this campaign.

BOOK REVIEW

Douglas H. Johnson, **The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars** (revised edition subtitled **Peace or Truce**), James Currey, 2011.

Eight years ago I was *Sudan Studies*' reviewer for the first edition of *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars* (*Sudan Studies* 31). The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was more than a year in the future, but the negotiation process already had enough momentum to encourage belief that a settlement to the war in the South was near. I wrote that Douglas Johnson's book stood as *'a prophetic warning to those who may seek short cuts to peace'*.

In the years since then, not only has the CPA been signed, and South Sudan travelled forward (rockily) to independence, but conflict has become more desperate in the doubly marginalized areas of Abyei, Southern Kordofan and Southern Blue Nile. War in Darfur rose to the pitch of a major international scandal, though it has faded again in the news while perhaps two million people remain displaced. These subsequent events unhappily bear out Johnson's point that war in Sudan has roots which go far deeper than could be reached by the compromise politics of the CPA.

But the book's title also leads us to hope for an unearthing of decisive factors which need to be addressed or taken into account. I complained then that it was *'less definitive and analytical'* than expected in this respect. The preface gave us (and now gives us more explicitly) a list of ten root causes, but much of the main text is not directly about them. Nor are they frequently invoked as explanatory levers. I would go further now and say that, while the book has much of importance to say about the causation of Sudan's civil wars, this is not central to it. About half of the text is a narrative history of the 1983-2005 war, and much of the rest could be seen as background to that particular conflict. This preoccupation is clearer now than before, because the war in Darfur since 2003 does not get anything like the same detail of attention, even in the revised edition.

Indeed, although the revised edition adds a valuable critical account of the CPA process, it is not in other respects revised very much. As a result, the passing of eight years' events creates some odd effects. The penultimate chapter, on the war economy, is still presented in the language of the present. We are told, for instance, that *'[t]he South's war economy is now based on a variety of exports into the informal economies of its neighbours, the income of which is divided between the Movement, its leaders and local people in disproportionate percentage'* (p.166). The telling of the past, as if it were the present, gives one a vivid sense of its possible significance to the world of oil revenues, governmental contracts and trading licences, but it cannot go on for long. Johnson serves notice (p. x) that this revision will be the last. The book's title imposes, if not a sell-by date, then a publish-by date; it is surely no accident that the final edition was issued in the month before South Sudan's independence.

It remains, so far as I know, much the most useful telling of the whole course of the SPLA war and the historical background to that war. One should hope that the decision to market it as a primer for aid-workers interested in peace issues reflects an intention on Johnson's part to produce an even more definitive account in a volume of its own.

Michael Medley

BOOK REVIEW

Leila Aboulela, **Lyrics Alley**, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 2010

This is the third of Leila Aboulela's novels. All of them are based on her own experiences of life in general; this one is largely autobiographical and is based upon her own experiences of life in Cairo and Khartoum in the 1950s. Many of the scenes will bring back memories to those who were in Khartoum at that time. It gives a 'family' experience to the events leading up to Independence in 1956. This book is a very enjoyable read and reveals the tensions within, and the views of, a leading northern Sudanese family at this period.

Gwyneth Davies

SSSUK

NOTICES

Sudan Studies Society of the United Kingdom
Minutes of the 24th Annual General Meeting
2nd October 2010
Khalili Theatre,
School of Oriental and African Studies,
Thornhaugh Street, London WC1H 0XG

The Chairman, Dr. Douglas Johnson, opened the meeting and welcomed the guests. He recorded SSSUK's appreciation of the caterer, Deiya, and her cooking.

1. **Apologies:**
These were received from Philip Bowcock, Andrew Wheeler, Lesley Forbes, Judith Large, Jeremy Coote, Benedetta de Alessi, Tigani el Tigani and the Sudanese Doctors' Union, which was having its AGM on the same day.

2. **Minutes of 23rd AGM of 3rd October 2009:**
The minutes were read and accepted.

3. **Matters arising from the minutes**:
There were no matters arising.

4. **Chairperson's Report**:
Douglas Johnson told a parable of a visit he had made to Egypt as a student. His hosts had asked him why he was going on to Sudan and he told them that Sudan was interesting. They asked why and he explained. They ended up telling each other how interesting Sudan was. The role of SSSUK was very important. The link between Britain and Sudan was strong, and ambivalent on both sides. Britain was part of Sudan's history and Sudan's was part of Britain's, as well. SSSUK was for anyone interested in studying Sudan.

He mentioned that plans for the International Conference in 2012 were now being discussed, especially with the Sudan Studies Association in the United States, which works closely with SSSUK on this every three years.

5. **Secretary's Report**:
Gill Lusk made an appeal for membership: for SSSUK not to survive but to thrive. Organising the Annual Symposium was the main part of her job and additional members helped us to keep costs down on the day. While you don't have to be a member to attend, joining helps to strengthen the Society and therefore the Symposium.

She thanked those who had helped to organise the meeting, especially Adrian Thomas, Michael Medley and Cherry Leonardi. She also acknowledged Michael's efforts in developing the website.

6. **Treasurer's Report:**
Adrian Thomas said that our situation had gone into reverse: we had a surplus of £475. This was largely because we had reduced the cost of the meeting through a different way of working with SOAS. Income had increased by some 15%. This came from more subscriptions, a bigger turnout and selling CDs of back issues of *'Sudan Studies'*. Printing costs had dropped a bit because we had only 2 issues of *'Sudan Studies'* (as scheduled) compared to 2008, when we had three (to catch up). We had 124 paying members. He appealed to people to pay on time. Two years ago, membership rose from £10 to £12 a year and some people still hadn't increased their standing orders. It would be much appreciated if they would. Also, if they would encourage friends and colleagues to join the SSSUK.

We now had different signing arrangements for the accounts. There had been delays because of using an outsider to examine the

accounts. However, SSSUK was not obliged to, under Charity Commission rules, unless the turnover was over £10,000. Dr. David Lindley had kindly offered to examine the accounts. Adrian wanted to thank him for his support and also for his work on Gift Aid (a scheme to give tax refunds on UK tax payers' payments to charity). We were hoping for a one-off payment from Gift Aid in the near future.

From the floor, Farouk Eissa asked whether something about donations could be included on the form. We should make people aware of SSSUK in other organisations and have links to other Sudanese organisations.

Mohamed Sawi suggested the form could appear on Sudanese websites, such as Sudan Nile and Sudanese on Line.

Imogen Thurbon suggested going on Facebook.

Selwa said that not everyone has cheques these days, and PayPal is free. Douglas said that PayPal charges the recipient, not the payee.

7. **Editor's Report**:
Dr. Jack Davies thanked everyone for their kind comments about *Sudan Studies*.

He tries to mix current events and history, such as the Anglo-French boundary commission. He wants more contributions! '*I struggle to persuade Sudanese to contribute*'. The Editor will deal with any language problems and the articles don't have to be academic. If anyone finds a book interesting, send in a 2-300 word review. Next year would be the 25th anniversary of SSSUK. Did we need a new cover?

I am going to chase you for articles, he told the speakers from the Symposium.

On the SSSUK website was a list of the back issues, with numbers 1-42 available.

A debate followed about distributing *Sudan Studies* for free and with password protection. Jack noted that some societies allow all but the last three issues for free. Douglas said it might encourage people to join. Someone asked why a password was needed and Michael said that the publication was a way to get new members: it is the only material benefit members get from joining SSSUK.

8. **Election of officers**:
Douglas Johnson was re-elected Chairperson.
Gill Lusk was elected Secretary.
Adrian Thomas was re-elected Treasurer.

9. **Any Other Business**:
Jack mentioned articles about the late Professor Peter Holt and the late Professor Peter Shinnie will appear in *Sudan Studies*.

The AGM drew to a close.

Sudan Studies Society of the UK (Charity Registration No. 328272)
Accounts for 2010

INCOME	2010	2009
	£	£
Membership dues	2,023.73	1,683.22
Sale of Publications and CDs	43.00	168.00
Interest on Bank Accounts	2.12	2.01
Donations	34.00	71.00
AGM/Symposium	843.00	921.00
Grand Total	**2,945.85**	**2,845.23**

EXPENDITURE	2010	2009
	£	£
Printing & Editorial	994.76	865.64
Secretarial Expenses	33.64	25.70
Committee Room Hire Committee Travel	39.40	35.40
Website	105.75	117.30
Other		
AGM/Symposium	861.98	842.85
Total	**2,035.53**	**1,886.89**
Surplus for the Year	910.32	958.34
Grand Total	**2,945.85**	**2,845.23**

ASSETS	2010	2009
Bank Balance on 1st January	6,182.73	5,224.39
Bank Balance at 31st December	7,093.05	6,182.73
Surplus	**910.32**	**958.34**

Adrian Thomas 8.7.11

Prepared by Adrian Thomas
Honorary Treasurer, SSSUK

AK Lindley 11.7.11

Checked on behalf of members by
Dr David Lindley, SSSUK Committee

Sudan Studies is published twice a year by the Sudan Studies Society of the UK (SSSUK). Views expressed in notes, articles and reviews, published in *Sudan Studies* are not necessarily those held by the SSSUK, or the Editor, or the Editorial Board. They are published to promote discussion and further scholarship in Sudan Studies.

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Notes for Contributors

SSSUK welcomes notes and articles intended for publication, which will be assessed by the Editorial Board. The normal maximum length of an article is 5,000 words including footnotes; longer articles may be accepted for publication in two or more parts. Notes and articles should be typed and double spaced and should normally be submitted as paper copy and as word processed files (in PC format) on diskette or preferably as an e-mail attachment, if at all possible. SSSUK retains the right to edit articles for reasons of space and consistency of style and spelling. *Sudan Studies* aims to follow the editorial style of *African Affairs,* the Journal of the Royal African Society.

Manuscripts are not normally returned to authors, but original material such as photographs will be returned.

It is helpful to have, very briefly (2 to 3 lines), any relevant details about the author – any post held, or time recently spent in the Sudan

Single copies and back numbers may be obtained via the Hon Editor at a cost of £8 per copy.