

## Booked for Travel

# Baghdad on the Thames



Arab visitor at a London market—"Their shopping list includes the hotels themselves."

by Horace Sutton

**W**HATEVER PROBLEMS may be encountered by those Arabs who live on the West Bank of the Jordan, other disciples of Allah are having no trouble encamping in force in the West End of London. Those upper-middle-class sheikhs who once roistered in Beirut before it became a revolutionary shooting gallery have long since elected to dispense their favors in London's spiffiest neighborhood. The West End, and particularly Park Lane, has become a playland where visiting Arabs sift through the expensive boutiques, browse in the Rolls-Royce showrooms where lavender limousines are displayed with signs printed in Arabic, and engage vast suites of rooms in the city's best hotels. Their shopping list has included some of the hotels themselves. Of the elegant cluster of Park Lane hotels—the two-year-old Inter-Continental, the small Londonderry, the Hilton, the Grosvenor House, the Dorchester, and the Inn on the Park—one, the Dorchester, is already in Arab hands.

At tea there the other day, the waiters in tailcoats were bustling about as always, carrying trays of sweet tarts and setting down pots of steaming brew, the lifeblood of the British. There was no outward evi-

dence of Arab ownership, but according to a British friend, that was to be expected. "They buy the hotels and then make sure no other Arabs come there," he said. The line was delivered as an off-the-cuff snippet of blasphemy that should not be accepted as ordinary Arab modus. If anything, the Arabs here tend to keep a low profile in their financial arrangements; they bought the Chelsea Hotel and then turned it over to Holiday Inns to run. Somewhat more harrowing was the Arab purchase of the Carlton Tower, allegedly even while Prime Minister Begin of Israel was asleep inside.

The Arabs' private presence in London, as apart from their financial investments, often seems bizarre, especially played against the backdrop of this supercivilized settlement on the Thames. The hotel managers are sometimes placed in difficult straits trying to accommodate a sheikh who arrives at the head of a sizable entourage. Arabs from the Gulf states are as punctilious in living according to religious dictate as they are by seasoned custom. Wife or wives must be installed on a different floor from the paterfamilias, and a meeting room must be arranged somewhere in between. A common room for bodyguards and other functionaries also needs to be set aside. And then there is the matter of special dietary requirements.

Some sheikhs, and other Arab males of high social station, arrange quarters for their families in Park Lane hotels and then lease a separate suite for themselves in another part of town. The men have the run of the city, and the women and the children are left to behold the Disneyland of the city: elevators coming and going, splendid horse guards riding past hotel windows, and the flow of buses, cabs, limousines, and people coursing the boulevards. The children sent downstairs to the kiosk for purchases of gum or candy are given crisp bills with which to pay, but they often disdain the change. Stories accrue of "fivers"—five-pound notes—found in the gutter, dropped, possibly disdainfully, when handed as change by a cabbie. There are even gaudier tales of Arabs who arrive in London, buy a Rolls or a Bentley, and upon leaving again for home give it to the chauffeur. The word is, or so says a London Arab watcher, to use a Rolls while abroad in Britain, but go back to a Cadillac at home.

That stretch of rarified London between Wellington Arch and Marble Arch, which marks the limits of Park Lane, has become such a popular neighborhood for visiting Arabs that a newsstand strategically placed along the byway carries over 20 journals printed in Arabic. There is not an English, French, German, Italian, Greek, Japanese, or American paper among them.

What brings the Middle Eastern visitors to this particular quarter are the fine hotels, which now occupy much of the eastern fringe of Hyde Park, and, of course, the proximity to Piccadilly, Regent Street, Bond Street, and Grosvenor and Berkeley squares, all of them a modest walk in decent weather.

The latest American-managed entry along this newly developed hotel row, the London Inter-Continental, has landed on the most advantageous site of all, right at Hyde Park Corner. Some rooms face the heroic Wellington Arch, and at 10:45 each morning—for those still lolling about their hotel rooms—the Household Cavalry in shiny, plumed helmets, swords at the shoulder, ride past the south face of the hotel en route to the changing of the guard at Whitehall.

The Wellington Arch, with all its fluted columns and cornices, is topped by the Quadriga, a two-wheeled Roman chariot representing war, into which a winged bronze figure (Peace) has seemingly just landed. Of course Peace didn't just land, for the statue has been in place, both maligned and adored, since 1912. It replaced an even more controversial equestrian

statue of Wellington, a work so large that a dinner party for eight was held inside it.

The Inter-Continental has adopted the Quadriga as its trademark, and the charging horses and the winged Peace—crown of olive branches held aloft—appear on all its letterheads and envelopes. It was the eighth duke of Wellington who came to open the hotel in September 1975, having been invited by its owner, the Apsley Park Hotel Company Limited, to award the hotel a royal, neighborly blessing.

The Wellington connection is apt enough, for in 1817, then a commander of international celebrity, Wellington bought an extravagant domicile called Apsley House, a mansion bearing the august address, Number One, London. It stands, even more extravagantly expanded by Wellington, behind the Inter-Continental.

Only two years after Waterloo and still in the flush of victory, Wellington set about refurbishing Apsley House, preparing it, possibly without realizing it, for the historical role it would ultimately command as a museum of artifacts recalling Europe's ultimate triumph over Napoleon. There is at hand every personal necessity for every human foible that even supreme commanders must endure—boxes of pills, razors and scissors, shaving gear and toothbrushes, as well as penciled orders on parchment skin, all of them Wellington's.

Every year, from 1830 until 1852, reunions of Waterloo veterans were held in the Waterloo Gallery, with the banquet table laid with its Portuguese dinner service, a gift of the Portuguese prince regent, in 1814. The heroic paintings on one wall face the windows that were flung open to accept the trees of Hyde Park perfuming the June night on which the reunion was held.

Wellington did not, like an old soldier, fade away. He became both statesman and, in 1828, prime minister. After the Second World War, the seventh duke of Wellington gave Apsley House and its rich possessions to the nation, and the place was turned over to the Victoria and Albert Museum to administer.

Of the great mansions of Mayfair—Wellington's aside—the last imposing one is Baron Leopold Rothschild's Florentine flat, which, as a classy gambling club known as Les Ambassadeurs, is now a neighbor to the Inter-Continental. Les Ambassadeurs's bar is the baron's old library; there is dancing in the dining room, a sauna and massage room, and a barber's salon that clips members only.

Not every branch of the Inter-Continental chain would have fit into this neighborhood, but this edition of the Pan American

subsidiary does so with extraordinary verve and style. That the builders refrained from sending some soaring, oppressive tower into the sky alongside Number One, London deserves some commendation in itself; but the refinement of the rooms, the views over the historic corner, and the appointments of the house itself are extraordinary, coming as they do in a time when flash often wins over taste.

Le Soufflé, the Inter-Continental's signal effort in regal dining, would be the vortex of social stir had it opened as a private London restaurant, that is, not part of a hotel. It is, in kitchen and in design, the quintessence of taste, the soufflés themselves coming in an assortment of flavors, to say very little of creations like Scotch salmon sautéed in butter with sorrel sauce and veal scallops filled with a lobster mousse.

Being a Pan American subsidiary, the hotel makes a special effort to have its concierge handle air reservations with aplomb. FTs, an airline handle for frequent foreign travelers, get special attention from Pan Am and on the London run, anyway, are often put in the tourist section, immediately behind first class, an enclave normally free of babies, birds, cats, and similar impedimenta. Making the transatlantic run the other day, the crew outdid themselves with esprit, crowning one of the best transatlantic crossings in memory with tea, crumpets, and Devonshire cream. That was before the decision on the new route case, which gave, among other things, Dallas-London to Braniff; and one wonders if the crews can maintain their high sense of morale in the face of losing sought-after routes to what many think are political pressures.

Braniff is offering Dallas-London nonstop with a leased 747 and hopes to work an interchange permitting Concorde service, Dallas-Washington-London, a tough act to follow.

When all the interested Arab airlines, now so large a presence in London, win transatlantic routes, the competition will be even tougher. Saudia is a little stiff-necked, and although it operates five 747 flights a week to Riyadh from London, it doesn't serve a drop of liquor. During fast periods, the food service is curtailed. But that doesn't go with Alia, The Royal Jordanian Line operated with the Syrians. (It already flies nonstop New York to Jordan). Jazziest of all is Gulf Air, which flies L-1011 Tri Stars in low configurations—40 seats in first class and 171 in economy. Among the amenities: a flying boutique, a stand-up bar, flying secretaries, and gold leather

throne chairs in first class. Gulf Air is owned jointly by Qatar, Muscat, and the other United Arab Emirates. It has 16 flights from London to the Gulf every week, landing at Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Dubai, Muscat. No fasting here. Ten-course dinners with seated service at tables for eight.

The old Arab watchers, and the British have certainly developed plenty of them, say that the rush began after the civil war closed Beirut, the Arabs choosing London because many had been schooled in England and because they knew they would be treated well here. In Paris, the story is quite different. Despite the official government position toward the Middle East, "Arab" has always suggested a faint air of derogation about it, summoning images of rug peddlers from North Africa.

This is not to say that there are not jokes and asides in the British papers, and jibes aplenty. But there is no bitterness. What attracts Arab men to London, so my own Arab watcher reports, is the availability of sex and of specialized medical checkups. Routine examinations are in huge demand, especially at Wellington Hospital, where the administration must cope with the singular wants of the patients and the physical presence of the bodyguards, too.

Besides everything else, Arab visitors like the climate in London, and who can be unfriendly toward a visitor who enjoys what everyone else has been complaining about for centuries? ●

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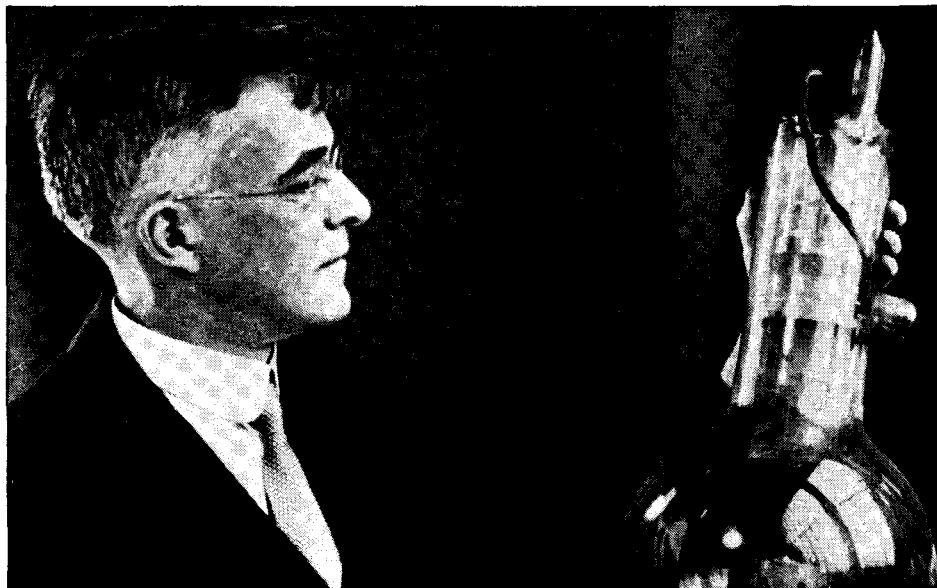
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# Introducing Dr. Irving Who?



Langmuir, with early gas-filled electronic tube—"A scientist difficult to categorize."

by Albert Rosenfeld

AS THE BIOGRAPHER of Irving Langmuir, I was pleased a few years ago to be invited to spend a Saturday evening as the moderator of a panel of distinguished scientists gathered at the Stony Brook campus of the State University of New York to discuss his work. The meeting would be held, I was told, at Langmuir College. How nice, I thought, to see recognition extended to this great but underadmired scientist, to sit in what I assumed was a college of science named after him, and to hear biologist H. Bentley Glass, Nobel physicist C. N. Yang, and Langmuir's former colleague Vincent J. Schaefer review his accomplishments before an audience of appreciative students.

Langmuir College, alas, turned out to be not an instructional college at all but rather a dormitory (a *residential* college, in the British tradition). Attendance at our program was disappointingly sparse. And the students who did show up were for the most part rather hostile; at least the vocal ones were. The Vietnam War was then still on, and science was associated in their minds with nasty things: napalm, defoliants, pollution. Moreover, irony upon irony, I was informed that the students had

wanted to name their dorm Harpo Marx College, and they resented being overruled by the administration—and having a *scientist's* name foisted upon them at that!

If a contest were held to select the greatest American scientist, a good case could be made for Irving Langmuir. Yet among American lay people, even those who are educated and cultivated, Langmuir remains almost unheard of. What is it, I wonder, that brings some scientists to the attention of the public but leaves so many others—who have achieved as much or more unheard of? For instance, I would have expected my biography, first published in 1962 (and only in England), to be by now but one of several biographies of Langmuir; yet it is still the only one that exists. It can't be that the public is totally uninterested in scientific types because new biographies do keep appearing about men like Einstein, Edison, and Oppenheimer.

It's not that I expect people, even my best friends, to have read the book, especially since there has never been an American edition. Nor am I too surprised that the magnitude of Langmuir's contributions to science and technology is not fully appreciated. But I never quite get over my dismay at how few people of my acquaintance know *anything* about Langmuir—or even recognize his name. Only now and

then does the topic somehow arise in conversation. When it does, part of the dialogue will typically go something like this: "Oh—a biography! Of whom?"

"Irving Langmuir."

And I can nearly always count on: "Irving *Who*?"

I usually say the name again and spell it. Then I take note of the other person's pleading look that says, Aren't you going to give me a clue? So I explain that Langmuir was a great though never very well-known scientist ("Oh, yes, of course!"), and as a rule, we quickly move on to some other subject.

I have had similar experiences even among college faculty members—on occasions, for instance, when I have been introduced as a lecturer or panelist. Sooner or later, someone says, "Oh, I didn't know you had written a biography." We then wind up with the "Irving *Who*?" number again. I have heard it so often that I sometimes catch *myself* thinking of Langmuir as Irving Who.

COULD LANGMUIR'S relative anonymity be due to his industrial background—the fact that he spent most of his productive years working at the General Electric Research Laboratory rather than at, say, Harvard or Berkeley? That explanation won't do. One only has to think of Charles Proteus Steinmetz, the electrical engineering genius who gained his comparative renown while also working at GE—and he didn't even win the Nobel Prize, as Langmuir did (chemistry, 1932). Very few people can tell you what Steinmetz *did*, but they are somehow familiar with the eccentric, hunch-backed genius of Schenectady. Perhaps it was his very "deformity" that fixed him in people's minds—as was perhaps the case with, say, Toulouse-Lautrec—whereas Langmuir was so "normal" physically. In fact, Langmuir was a vigorous outdoorsman (he was among the first to introduce skiing to this country) who once walked 52 miles in a single day and who climbed the Matterhorn after he was forty, with virtually no preliminary conditioning.

One handicap in terms of Langmuir's public visibility is the fact that he was not associated with any single major theory, discovery, or breakthrough. There are a few esoteric items that bear his name—for instance, the Langmuir probe (for studying ionized gases) and the Langmuir isotherm (a method for analyzing the way molecules cling to surfaces)—but he produced nothing like the Einstein theory or the Salk vaccine. Though he developed the gas-