

# PHILATELIC PIRATES of the TRUCIAL COAST

By "Nomad"

AS early as the 17th century a traveller had referred to the seaboard inhabitants of the Trucial Coast—stretching 400 miles from Ras Musandam to the base of the Qatar Peninsula—as “a fierce and treacherous people, gaining as much by fraud as merchandise”. The lack of any maritime authority during the succeeding century encouraged them to adopt piracy as a principal way of life, and by the early years of the 19th century the pirate fleets had become so powerful and well organised as to be able to attack with impunity all shipping passing through these waters.

It is hardly surprising that this came to be known as the PIRATE COAST; and, despite a punitive expedition sent in 1809 by the Government of Bombay in co-operation with the Sultan of Muscat, the depredations continued until 1819. In that year, the East India Company despatched a large force, commanded by Major-General Sir William Grant Keir, to abate the nuisance once and for all.

The town of Ras al Khaimah, the most notorious pirate stronghold, was attacked and the fort destroyed and boats burned. The other lairs along the Pirate Coast were threatened with similar treatment, as a result of which the Sheikh of Dubai, on January 9th, 1820 (at Ras al Khaimah!), was the first to sign a treaty agreeing to the cessation of plunder and piracy.

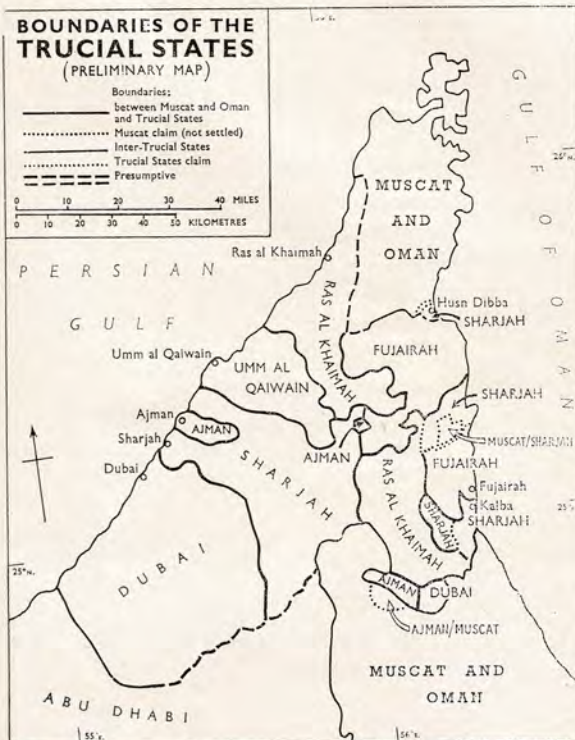
This treaty was followed by various supplementary agreements banning piracy, gun-running and the slave trade; and, finally, the signing in 1853, by all the Trucial Chiefs, of a Treaty of Peace in Perpetuity; this, indeed, was the treaty by which right the British Government still watches over the peace of the Gulf. As has so often happened, the British came to trade and, in the maintenance of their commercial interests and protection of their communications, acquired political influence and responsibility.

## The new “piracy”

History tends to repeat itself and, since 1963, a new form of “piracy” seems to have developed along parts of the Trucial Coast, the issue of coloured adhesive labels purporting to be primarily required for the pre-payment of postal charges in the States whose name they bear, but which, in certain cases, would appear to be intended to benefit revenue by purely philatelic sales.

However, before looking at the individual States and their claims to be conductors of postal business, let us briefly survey the present situation in the Trucial States generally.

Although only six of them lie on the Trucial Coast Fujairah, which joined the others in 1952, being on the Gulf of Oman, the States are seven in number. All are independent with patriarchal internal administration, and a Tribal social organisation. Their total area is reckoned at anything from 32,000 to 100,000 square miles, according to who is drawing the boundaries, and the population is estimated at varying figures between 86,000 and 110,000; four-fifths of the inhabitants live in coastal towns and villages, and the remainder in inland oases, the largest of which (Buraimi)



contains six villages belonging to Abu Dhabi, as well as two claimed by Muscat.

The British Resident, through the Political Resident in Bahrain, is responsible for external affairs; and the Trucial Oman Scouts, based in Sharjah, help to maintain internal peace. The British Political Agent for the Trucial States is resident in Dubai, and there is also a British Political Agent in Abu Dhabi. Various development schemes, notably trade schools in Dubai and Sharjah and an agricultural station in Ras al Khaimah, are financed by the British Government; and the State of Kuwait has provided funds and technical assistance for the building of mosques, schools and clinics.

Although Abu Dhabi is the only State in which oil has been found, and which receives large revenues therefrom, all the other States, except Fujairah, receive interim payments from oil companies holding concessions to search for oil in their territories, both on and off shore. Otherwise, their revenues are limited to customs duties and to the income from meagre exports of dates, dried fish and a certain amount of fruit, vegetables and tobacco. Excluding Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the joint annual revenue of the other five States is little more than £250,000. The universal currency is the Indian External Rupee, but the Maria Theresa Dollar also circulates away from the coast.

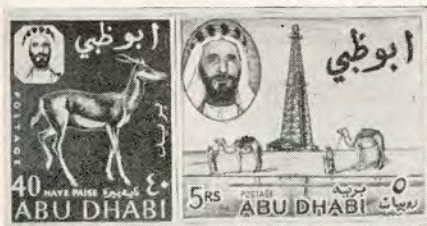
The Trucial Council was formed in 1952, and the Rulers

of the Trucial States meet once or twice a year to discuss matters of common interest. Is it beyond the bounds of possibility that at one such meeting a matter of interest common to all but Abu Dhabi was discussed, the means of bolstering the finances of those States that had small hope of immense oil revenues? And that perhaps the discussion, fostered by outside commercial interests, led to the selling of their postal souls to the philatelic devil?

### Abu Dhabi

Literally "The Father of a Gazelle", and no doubt thus named on account of the large numbers of gazelle that were once to be found in this area, Abu Dhabi is the largest of the States, with an archaeological history 4,000 years old, and has an area of 24,000 square miles. Its coast line extends from the town of Abu Dhabi westwards to include Tarif and Jebel Dhanna and, inland, its territory runs as far as Buraimi. The population is now about 25,000, of which three-quarters are reputed to live in the several villages in Buraimi Oasis.

Oil production from the submarine oilfield of Umm Shaif commenced in 1962, and from Murban in 1963, bringing immense revenues to the State. Das Island, which belongs to Abu Dhabi, has been developed as the base and loading terminal for the Umm Shaif field. There are airfields at Abu Dhabi Town, Buraimi and on Das Island.



British Postal Agency post offices were opened at Abu Dhabi and for Das Island (the latter is actually in Bahrain!) on March 30th, 1963, and the stamps currently in use in Muscat (not the Trucial States issue) were also put on sale here. The Abu Dhabi definitives followed on March 30th, 1964; and a short set of three values featuring hawks was issued on March 30th, 1965. Although not so inscribed, they commemorated the opening of the Post Office.

There is a considerable volume of commercial mail from the oil companies (Abu Dhabi and Das Island) and from other commercial organisations in Abu Dhabi Town. The Post Office continues to be a British Postal Agency, under the control of the British Postal Superintendent in Bahrain.

### Dubai

The name derives from the Arabic word for young locusts not yet able to fly and, in this form, means a soft tract of desert where locusts lay their eggs. Dubai is the largest town (population 40-50,000) in the Trucial States, and is the principal port for much of the interior (Oman: population 550,000; area 82,000 square miles). The natural harbour at Dubai has been improved recently and imports in 1962 were valued at £18 million. Its prosperity is greatly due to the silting up of Sharjah Creek and to the influx of Persian merchants from the port of Lingah in the early years of this century. The State extends for some 45 miles along the coast and 40 miles inland; it also claims the village of Hatta in the Hajar Mountains on the Muscat Border. The existing airfield is



Used only in Dubai.

being enlarged to international standards, and municipal services have been introduced.

The Post Office at Dubai was originally opened by the Government of India in 1909, and unoverprinted Indian stamps were used until October 1947. In that month, Pakistan having taken over the postal agencies in Dubai and Muscat, Indian stamps with the Nasik "Pakistan" overprint came into use.

On April 1st, 1948, the British Post Office assumed responsibility, and stamps of Great Britain surcharged with value only (annas and rupees) were placed on sale. These, in turn, were superseded on January 7th, 1961, by the Trucial States set intended for use in the Trucial States generally, but in fact only ever issued in Dubai. These continued in use until June 14th, 1963, when Dubai assumed responsibility for its own postal affairs.

This last change followed the appointment of a philatelic agency in Beirut, which assumed full charge of the Post Office and announced on May 5th, 1963, that

"the Government of Dubai has adopted a special policy for issuing attractive stamps in limited quantities, according to the market demand, and easily obtainable at normal prices by all subscribers who comply with our sales conditions".

One must at least give them credit for having made quite clear that they intended to benefit their pockets by catering for purely philatelic demand, unlike Sharjah and Ajman which, at the time of the Churchill and Kennedy commemoratives, still pretended to be more mindful of the alleged requirements of their letter-writing inhabitants than of any incidental revenue accruing from philatelic sales!

### Ras al Khaimah

Literally "Tent Point", and so named because the large tent pitched on the headland by one of the tribal chiefs of early times provided a conspicuous landmark for sailors. Archaeological remains show Ras al Khaimah to have been a port long before it achieved notoriety as the principal pirate lair; and the town still accommodates half the 10,000 inhabitants of the State, which extends some 40 miles along the coast and 80 miles inland.

An agricultural station is financed by Great Britain and there are exports of dates, vegetables, fruit and tobacco. The State achieved some prominence in the English Press in the Spring of 1964 when one of its alleged tribal sheikhs visited England on a camping holiday and was bidden to "move on" by the police.

Ras al Khaimah's postal history began in December 1964; and, at the Ruler's request, the G.P.O. Philatelic Bureau temporarily undertook the philatelic sale of its stamps.\* This should not necessarily be accepted as a visa to respectability, as the State Post Office is completely independent and has no connection with the British Postal Agencies in the Gulf.

### Ajman

The word has a variety of meanings but in this context probably derives from a section of the tribe of the same name.

Ajman is the smallest of the Trucial States and lies between Sharjah and the village of Hamriyah; it also possesses small inland enclaves at Manama and Masfut (not shown on the map) and the total population is less than 5,000.

Ajman achieved catalogue status with the issue of stamps



\* Now handled by the Crown Agents Stamp Bureau.—Editor.

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**Philatelic Pirates of the Trucial Coast** (contd. from page 789) in June 1964. Contrary to official statements then made, there had *not* previously been a British Postal Agency in the State.

### Sharjah

This is the generally accepted Anglicised spelling, but it should more correctly be SHARQAḤ if one has regard for the Arabic spelling. The name is, however, pronounced "Sharjah" or "Shargah, meaning in Arabic "East".

The coastline of the State is about 10 miles long, Ajman being an enclave thereon, and the territory extends some 50 miles inland; the population is about 5,000. The port was at one time the second most important on the Trucial Coast, but the harbour is now silted up. The village of Hamriyah, which recently achieved notoriety by issuing its own stamps (Sharjah stamps overprinted "Government of Hamriyah"), which were promptly disavowed by Sharjah, lies on the Trucial Coast north-east of Ajman.

The Dependencies of Kalba, Dibba and Khor Fakkan all lie some distance away on the Batinah Coast on the Gulf of Oman. Ras al Khaimah originally belonged to Sharjah, but separated in 1866 when the domains of the former ruler of Sharjah were divided amongst his four sons. Fujairah asserted its independence of Sharjah in 1901.

In the 1930s Sharjah achieved some importance as a staging post on the Imperial Airways route to the Far East, but its airport now serves only local air lines operating in the Gulf. In recent years it has served as the Base H.Q. of the Trucial Oman Scouts, a British-officered military force financed by Great Britain for the preservation of peace in the Trucial States. It enjoys a small income from royalties on red oxide mined on the island of Abu Musa.

Sharjah's postal history began in 1963 and was apparently sponsored by a one-time American national who adopted Sharjah nationality for the purpose. It should be noted that many Yemeni provisional issues followed his arrival in that unhappy country. Despite the somewhat astonishing stamp-issuing policy of this State, it is still represented at the U.P.U. by Great Britain.

### Umm al Qaiwain



The literal translation is "The Mother of Qaiwain", but the derivation of Qaiwain is obscure. This is another of the smaller States, which has a minor export trade in dried fish. Its enclave at the oasis of Falaj ibn

Mu'alla produces small quantities of fruit and palm products.

Stamps were first issued in June 1964 and, as with Ajman, did *not* replace British stamps with value surcharges, as was stated.

### Fujairah

Situated on the Gulf of Oman and so named from a spring of water at the foot of the hills, Fujairah was admitted to the Trucial Council in 1952. Its few inhabitants include the hill people of the mountains in the Musandam Peninsula and cultivators on the fertile plain along the Batinah Coast, and its exports are limited to small quantities of tobacco. Its picturesque fort still stands unrepaired since it was bombarded by the Royal Navy in 1952 to secure the release of slaves held there.

Fujairah's postal history dates from September 1964.

\* \* \* \*

To sum up. Two States that require a postal service are:—

**Abu Dhabi.** A British Postal Agency in a State that has no need of philatelic revenue. Conservative in its stamp issues, and with a considerable external commercial mail.

**Dubai.** A thriving port with a long-established Post Office serving a large mercantile community. Conservative in its stamp issues until a Lebanese Philatelic Agency took over control of the State Post Office.

One probable border-line case:—

**Sharjah.** Although its postal history was undoubtedly of philatelic origin it can perhaps be said that a postal service is at least desirable, if not essential.

And four that created a "postal service" solely to justify the issue of stamps for philatelic sale: **Ras al Khaimah, Ajman, Umm al Qaiwain, Fujairah.**

In defence of the last four, however, it must be remembered that, in this modern world, an issue of stamps is an essential status symbol for any independent State, and if, whatever the reason, Tristan da Cunha and Pitcairn must have stamps for their meagre populations, then why should the fish dryers of Umm al Qaiwan and the hill people of Fujairah (poor correspondents though they may be) be left out in the heat? Likewise, if it was essential that the stamps of the Falkland Islands should be overprinted for each of the four dependent territories, is Sharjah to be denied the right to ensure that the world shall know that the fishing village of Khor Fakkan is hers for all time?

Whether it is necessary for Ajmanis to be encouraged in the noble art, for Fujairans to be exhorted to throw the discus and for Dubaians to be weaned from maritime to orbital voyages, depends entirely upon you, the philatelic prey. So long as you are ready to buy this rubbish, can you blame them for producing it?

You have already built a school on Pitcairn Island; do you also wish to finance the sundry schemes of the Pirate Coast? Do you really feel it your duty to pay 15s.4d. apiece to Ajman to provide free advertising for S.G. Catalogues? If you do, good luck to you, but remember that Dubai was honest enough to warn you of the conditions under which you would be permitted to part with your money. And

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consider also the British anti-locust party which, in recent times, penetrated too far up-country in Ras al Khaimah, where the local residents, taking time off from letter writing, deprived the visitors of all their belongings, including their trousers. CAVEAT EMPTOR!

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