

# John Luttrell

Born 1915. A career in Middle East oil companies.  
Biography by his son Robert.

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*This life story of John Luttrell was contributed to Lives Retold in 2021 by its author, his son Robert.*

# 1. Introduction

I was 24 when my father died, just a few months shy of his 70th birthday. Reserved and introspective, he was happiest surrounded by his books, of which there were many (one to read, one for the library and one to lend to friends). For the last decade of his life he suffered from severe Parkinson's Disease which rendered verbal communication especially difficult. I have attempted to piece together aspects of his life – Poet, Intelligence Officer, a career in the Middle East - but the resulting picture is frustratingly fragmented. As I approach my 60th birthday I wish I had got to know him better.



*John Luttrell with his wife Elizabeth.*

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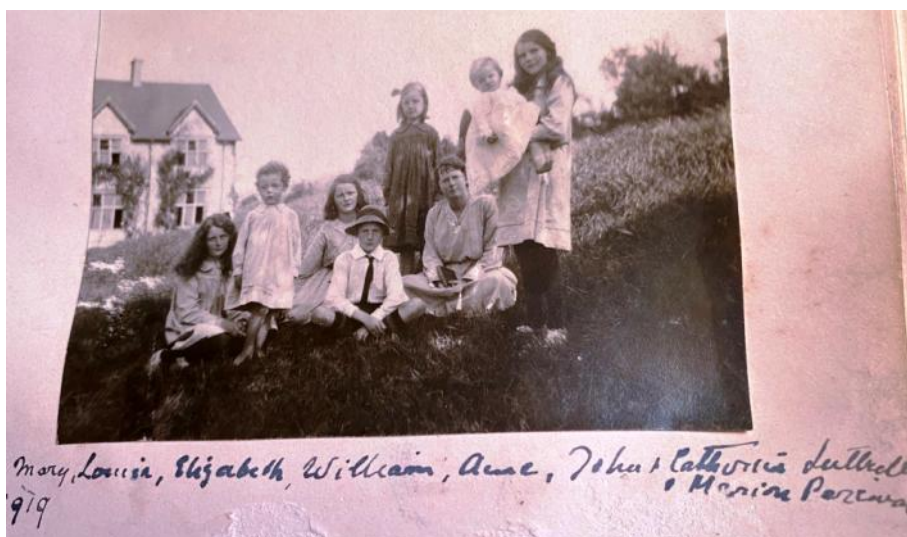
## 2. Timeline

1915	Born 31 Dec
1917	Father dies
1926	Anne dies
1928	Mary dies
1929-35	Dauntsey's School
1937	Spanish War (aid work for the Refugee Children Aid Society)
1928-39	South Africa (citrus farming)
1939-40	University of Grenoble (Cours de Vacances) School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London
1940-46	Captain, Intelligence Corps
1946-48	Control Commission, Germany
1949-51	British Petroleum
1952-68	Iraq Petroleum Company
1952	Tripoli, Lebanon
1953-55	Basrah
1955-57	Kirkuk
1958-68	Doha, Qatar
1959	Married to Lady Elizabeth Shirley
1960	Mother dies
1961	Son born
1968	Return to England
1970-72	American Embassy
1972-74	Consultant for Qatar National Museum
1975	Diagnosed with Parkinson's
1985	Died 26th September

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### 3. Early years

John Fownes Luttrell was born in Bere Alston, Devon on 31 December 1915 to Hugh Luttrell, MP for West Devon, and his wife Dorothy (nee Wedderburn). John was the sixth youngest of seven children born between 1904 and 1918 – Mary, Louisa, Elizabeth, William, Anne and Catherine. His father died when John was just two years old, and his sisters Mary and Anne both died before he had reached his teens.



*John with his sister Catherine.*

The family moved to Bussage, Gloucestershire. John was educated at Dauntsey's School in Devizes and later studied at Grenoble University, and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.





*Front view of the house in Bussage, Gloucestershire*



*View from John's bedroom window in the Bussage house.*



*The village of Bussage.*

At the age of 20 he went to Spain to join a group of English volunteers assisting in the work of the Refugee Children Aid Society from August to November 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. He was issued with a military pass enabling him to travel between Puigcerda and Barcelona. He recorded his experience in poetry and photography.



*With volunteers at the Refugee Camp. John Lutrell is marked with an X.*

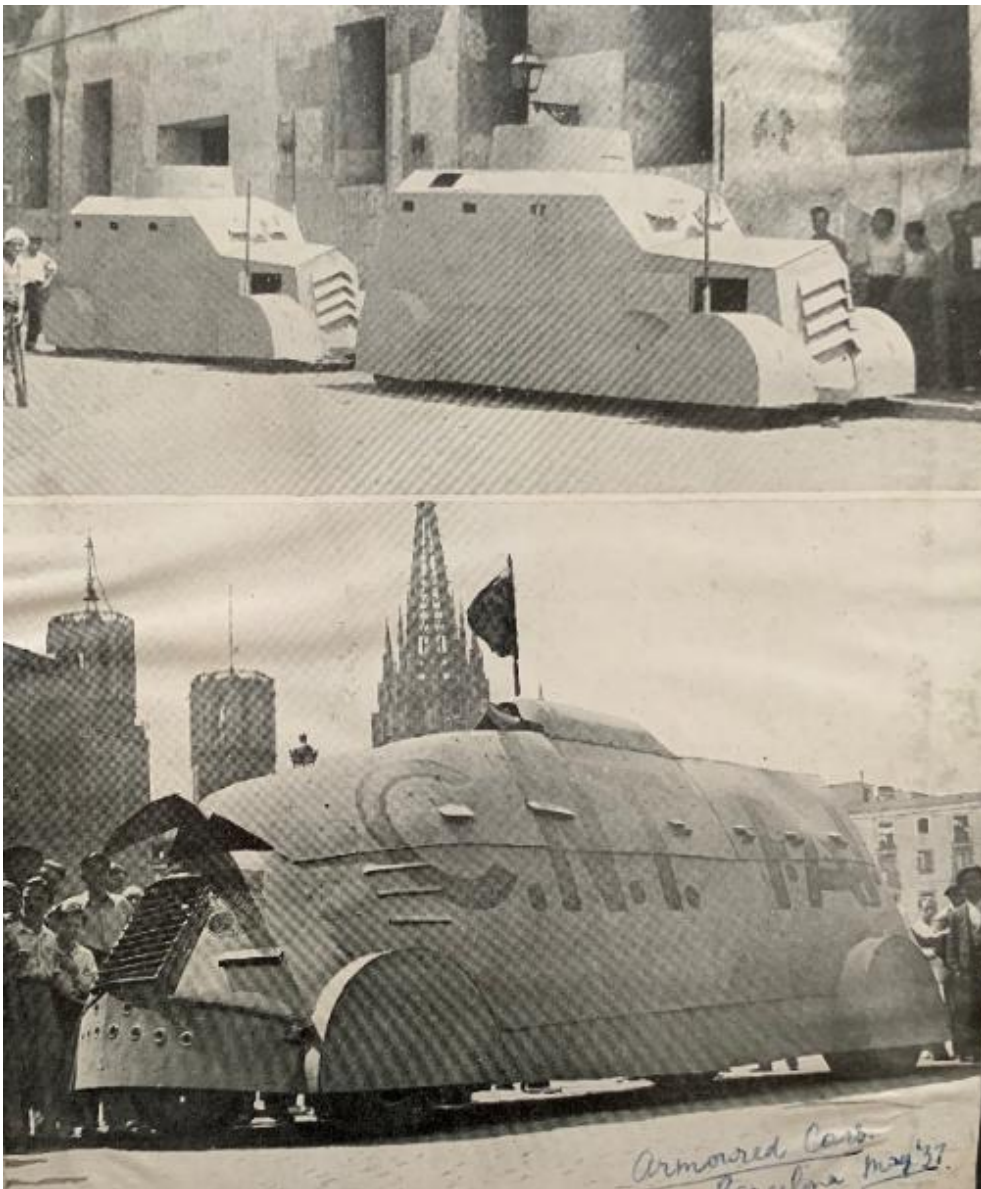


*English volunteers and Spanish refugee children. John Lutrell marked with an X.*

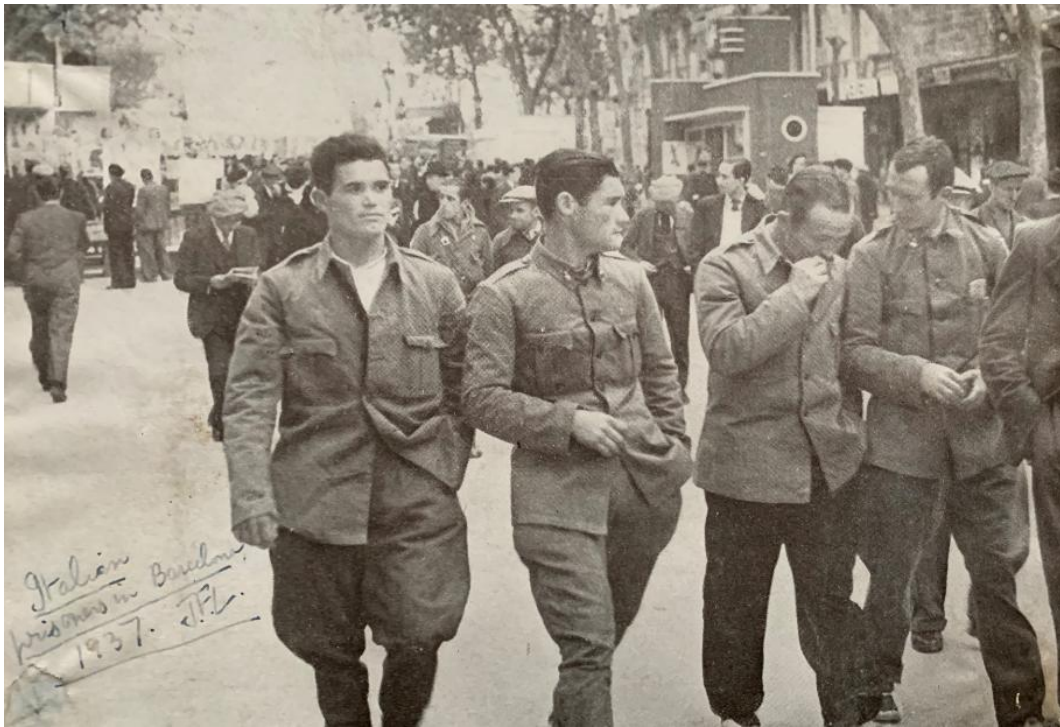




*Swimming pool at the camp, Puigcerda.*



*Armoured cars, Barcelona.*



*Italian prisoners in Barcelona, 1937.*



*Spanish war posters - 'To overthrow Fascism, build up the Air Force'. 'Assassins' (a vivid poster depicting enemy atrocities, bomb falling on Red Cross hospital, November 1937).*

John Luttrell spoke of his experiences in Spain in the press and at public meetings, illustrated below.



IN BARCELONA  
"Star" June 1938.

"JUST ANOTHER AIR  
RAID"

By JOHN FOWNES-LUTTRELL.

"New air raid on Barcelona . . . 300 killed, thousands injured." The news of fresh disasters flashes into headlines, occupies a few vivid seconds on the news-reels, and is forgotten. What lies behind these figures?

Here is a brief sketch of the great Spanish metropolis as I found it in November of last year. If the scene is at variance with the dispatches of some war correspondents, I can only claim that I was in Spain in a neutral capacity and with no axe to grind.

Entering Barcelona one's first impressions are not unlike those of any great European city. Here are the same broad avenues flanked by modern buildings, the roar of traffic, newspaper kiosks along the crowded pavements.

Perhaps the first evidences of war are the mysterious placards labelled "Refugio" and posted at regular intervals along every avenue. They represent Barcelona's system of air raid precautions. Each subterranean shelter is soundly constructed and bomb proof. Yet the figures of dead and injured soar with every raid.

As we penetrate the heart of Barcelona the ravages of war grow clearly visible. Here half a building has fallen away, exposing the interior, here a bomb-hole has been roped round. There are other ravages, too. The streets are full of restaurants, famous before the war for their food. Now one is lucky indeed to find a square meal throughout the entire city. At every street corner I saw bread queues, sometimes half a mile long. Small rolls were changing hands at a shilling a time. Another scarcity and one more bitterly resented by Barcelona people is tobacco. The shops will sell you any thing from pipe-cleaners to cigarette-papers; but to ask for a packet of cigarettes is to invite a polite shrug and "No, my Senor."

On the shop windows I found evidence of the great battle which broke out in Barcelona earlier in the year. One morning in April the citizens of Barcelona awoke to the sound of machine-gun fire. The Fascist element had planned to take the city by surprise. Up and down the streets hand-to-hand battles were waged with machine-guns and grenades. The Fascists at last took refuge in the great Post Office centre. A body of Republican troops surrounded the building and drove the occupants out floor by floor. Now only bullet-riddled shop windows remain to bear witness.

The war has had little effect on Barcelona's night life. As a raid precaution the streets are unlit. The cinemas, theatres and cabarets do a roaring trade. In the Teatro del Circo one can see for a modest sixpence the finest dancers in the world. Spain has always excelled in song and dance. In the news cinemas one can see films of current battles, and the sight of an enemy plane shot down draws wild applause.

What of the Spanish Republicans and the so-called "Red Terror"?

Soon after the outbreak of war the seat of Government shifted from Madrid to Valencia. When I arrived at Barcelona, the Government was moving in from Valencia as a precautionary measure. This Government was elected by the will of the Spanish people in the summer of 1936. It corresponds closely to the French Popular Front Government, and has never had the slightest connection with Soviet Russia. The Spanish Republicans are emphatically not "reds." They are best described as Anti-Fascists.

As we leave Barcelona by the Paris mail train the streets are dim. Our compartment is lit by a ghostly dim-bulb. Passing through the suburbs we sight familiar planes cooling in from the sea. The sound of warning sirens is followed by the dull thud of H.E. bombs. Another air raid has come to Barcelona.

'Just another air raid' (Johannesburg Star, June 1938).

Star **GIBRALTAR**  
9/1/38  
WHERE THE PERIL  
LIES

To the Editor of The Star

Sir,—A letter appeared recently in these columns with the startling title of "Gib' in Peril if Republican Spain Wins." The writer, Mr. D. J. O'Kelly, does not disguise his admiration of Francisco Franco. It would be idle, therefore, to protest against his aspersions on Republican Spain, which are as discourteous as they are certainly inaccurate.

At the same time, I do protest most strongly against the theory that the Spanish Government at Barcelona has serious designs upon Gibraltar. The fact is that all Spaniards, Nationalists and Republicans alike, hold strong views on the British occupation of Gibraltar. That they will attempt to realise these views by seizing the Rock is an illusion. Shorn of her former glories, Spain to-day ranks as a second class power where military and naval strength are concerned. A hypothetical attack on Britain via Gibraltar would obviously meet with swift annihilation.

The danger lies, as has been frequently pointed out, in the presence of Italian troops and future military concessions in the south of Spain. Italy to-day is not a second class Power.

J. F. LUTTRELL.

Star **SPAIN AGAIN!**  
COMINTERN ACTIVITIES

To the Editor of The Star

Sir,—I should like to tell Mr. J. F. Luttrell that I quite concur in his view that the Barcelona Government is unlikely to attempt the expulsion of the British from Gibraltar; my letter was intended to show the views of the Spanish "Reds," not their ability to give them effect, which at present is nil.

As for my reprehensible discourtesy to the Spanish Government, so called, it is impossible to express adequately one's abhorrence of the crimes for which that body is responsible. In a recent speech, Dean Inge stated that "before May, 1937, 50,000 persons had been butchered in Madrid and Barcelona alone under the eyes of the so-called Government." The circumstances attending many of these crimes are too revolting for publication.

I must take this opportunity of rebutting his naive statement that the Barcelona Government has nothing to do with Moscow. Let Mr. McGovern, M.P., who was in Barcelona a few months ago, speak. He is a well-known "Red" and had infinitely better means of judging the position than has the trifling Mr. Luttrell. He says: "Russia has bought her way into Spain. In return for Russian assistance in arms, Comintern has been given this tyrannical power and she uses it to imprison, torture and murder Socialists who do not accept the Communist line. There are two International Brigades in Spain, one a fighting force, drawn from the Socialist movement of the world, and the other an international Cheka drawn from Comintern's paid gangsters, especially from Germany and Italy."

Finally, as showing Soviet preparations for domination in Spain, let me quote the following extract from a book written by M. Yvon Delbos, recently Foreign Minister of France, who visited Russia and published, in 1936, on his return and before the revolt in Spain. He visited the Revolutionary Museum in Moscow and tells us: "Lastly, a special room has been devoted to the future Communist revolution in Spain. Copies of newspapers are shown, such as La Bandera Roja and La Palabra, portraits of Spanish Bolsheviks, and scenes of strikes and risings. It seems that the Soviets reckon upon achieving this first success of contagion among our friends on the other side of the Pyrenees." And they did!

D. J. O'KELLY.

Star **IN SPAIN**  
2/1/38  
RELIEF WORKER'S  
VIEWS

To the Editor of The Star

Sir,—In his spirited attempt to paint the Republicans "Red," Mr. O'Kelly draws more lavishly on quotation than his own initiative. Personally I have no use whatever either for Fascism or Bolshevism. Neither, I am glad to say, has the Spanish Government at Barcelona. It is composed of Liberals, Socialists and Communists, and corresponds closely to the recent Government of France. And who would call France a Bolshevik State?

As for Dean Inge's statement that 50,000 people were butchered in Madrid and Barcelona before May, 1937, the allegation is too fantastic to pursue. I can assure Mr. O'Kelly that all the people who deserved to be butchered escaped into France and Franco's territory long before May of last year. May I remind him that, whatever may be General Franco's position, all Spaniards who rebelled against the Government are guilty of a capital offence. In Spain quarter is neither expected nor given—to traitors.

Finally, let me refute the allegation that "Russia has bought her way into Spain." Of course, there are Russian arms in Spain. There are also arms in equal and greater quantity from France, Czechoslovakia and even England! Mr. O'Kelly may quote ad infinitum before he convinces me that Spain (Republican) is under "the tyrannical power" of Comintern.

With all due modesty, I can claim to know considerably more about the Spanish Republicans than any authorities Mr. O'Kelly has quoted. I was engaged on relief work in Spain from August to December of last year. During that period many distinguished people, possibly including Mr. O'Kelly's authorities, paid flying visits to Madrid and Barcelona, lasting perhaps a week!

J. F. LUTTRELL.

to Joburg  
- The Star  
URDAY, APRIL 1, 1939.

Letters to the Editor, Johannesburg Star, June 1938.



*Help the Starving  
of Spain*

PLEASE NOTE  
**PUBLIC MEETINGS**  
ON SUNDAY NEXT

Onward Hall, Yorkley, 2.45.  
Miners' Welfare Hall, Bream, 7.30

SPEAKERS:  
MR. M. PHILIPS PRICE, M.P.  
MRS. D. K. PERCIVAL

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MR. JOHN LUTTRELL,  
Recently returned from Spain, will be present  
to answer any questions on the Spanish  
situation. 5109

*Notice of public meeting at which John Luttrell spoke.*



*The bombing of Guernica.*





*Bombing of Madrid.*

### **SUNDAY MORNING IN SPAIN**

A Spanish peasant in the Pyrenees  
Looks down upon the plain.  
As in a dream he sees,  
Desolate villages,

Whose churchtowers stand amidst a heap of  
stones,  
Bleak fields untenanted.  
The sower's scattered bones  
Lie far on Aragon.

Beyond this plain incessant cannons roar.  
While on shell-furrowed fields  
Scattering the seeds of war,  
The black-winged Vultures soar.

(October 1937)

## **SONG OF DEAD SPANISH SOLDIERS**

We shall return to the land where we were born,  
To the terraced fields beneath the mountainside,  
To the sound of cow-bells, rustle of yellow corn,  
We shall return, we who have died.

O when the dawn fell on the Pyrenees,  
I rose and ran swift to a silver pool,  
And plunged and sang, as gay as a mountain  
breeze.  
My heart was afire and the morning cool.

One day the fascists came to bomb our town.  
Over the mountains shadow of black wings  
sweeping,  
And from an August sky stark hell rained down,  
Children screaming and mothers weeping.

We shall return indeed to our native land.  
Although the shells from which we could not  
hide  
Scattered our limbs upon the burning sand,  
We shall return, we shall not die!

(Spain, November 1937)

## **ON THE BARCELONA ROAD**

Night on the Pyrenees!  
Across a Spanish plain  
The glowing mountains wane  
Into obscurities.

Metallic monotone,  
A thousand cow-bells ring:  
Softly meandering  
The night winds make a moan.

For Barcelona bound,  
Two thundering camions roll.  
The silent guards patrol,  
Black night absorbs all sound.

Night on the Pyrenees!  
Beyond this moonlit plain War sleeps in Spain,  
War sleeps – and wakens Peace.

(October 1937)

**ASTURIAN REFUGEES ON PUIGCERDA  
STATION 1937**

To you who sang I dedicate my song,  
Who sang and starved, as on that night remained  
Of wine no single dreg, of bread no crumb.  
And yet,  
Huddled upon that dusty station yard  
Beneath a Spanish moon,  
A thousand voices loosed upon the night  
Such heart-compelling music.  
Old songs of Aragon, ballads of Castile,  
Drumbeat of marching tunes,  
Click of the castanet!  
Your homes are ashes now where the bombers  
passed,  
Where the swift shells moaned as they sped to  
massacre:  
And the night was bitter cold  
In the snow-swept Pyrenees  
To you who sang,  
To you who sang and starved!

(Spain, November 1937)

On 26th April 1938 he set sail for South Africa. There he spent time in Matabuffin station, East Transvaal, four hours east of Johannesburg, citrus farming with H.L.Hall & Sons.

He then secured a position in the Intelligence Corps where he served as a Lieutenant and then Captain in the Middle East from 1940-46.

As Army Press Censor “he was in a position which demanded most careful cooperation and considerable tact in his dealings with the Iraqi Government and newspaper officials”. (letter of reference 23 May 1946).

He wrote regularly to his mother and sisters during this period and the correspondence contains some amusing anecdotes. For instance, one Easter he was granted a few days’ leave and set off on foot through the desert to visit the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Some Bedouins took pity on him and insisted that he ride their donkey. The gardens proved to be a disappointment but inspired him to write a beautiful poem.



DIARY AND NOTES

Begun in Baghdad, Easter 1943

By John Fownes Luttrell,

together with various verses,  
and comments upon curious sights  
and episodes. MCMXLIII.



2

Sunday April 25th: EASTER.

Entering HILLA, the desert disappeared and the road ran at first through fields of corn and clover, and finally through green palmgroves, where birds of brilliant plumage flew and sang: the road widened into an avenue, bisected by a broad ribbon of flower beds: at last the Euphrates came into sight, with the town lying upon its banks. Crossing by a small bridge to the other side, we bore left along a main street and halted in a square in the centre of the town. Hilla is much smaller and infinitely cleaner than BAQHDAD: particularly remarkable in a provincial eastern town were the public gardens ablaze with flowers: the air seemed sweeter, the population more welcoming and friendly!



Sunday April 25th. EASTER.

Granted 2 days' leave, I set out from Baghdad on Easter Sunday morning for HILLA, sixty miles south of the Capital, and six miles from BABYLON. Hitch-hiked across the desert: a pleasant Spring day, with a fresh breeze blowing: on the horizon, Arab villages seemed to float in the air, an effect of mirage. After a forty mile ride in an Arab-driven and army-owned car, I walked a few miles to a small village, stopped for tea at an open air café & chatted with the local inhabitants, who were friendly. Afterwards, concluded my journey in the front seat of a large & alarmingly shaky local bus: several passengers squatted on the roof.



3

Sunday April 25th.

The bazaars of HILLA contain nothing spectacular: they are arranged in the usual manner, a labyrinth of intersecting alleys, lined with tiny hole-in-the-wall shops, each exhibiting and frequently manufacturing its own wares: thus, a "soukh" of materials runs into a "soukh" of pots and pans, the latter ending in a "soukh" of leather. In this last, I bought a strong plain wallet from the maker for 200 fils: a local village-sheikh, called Hashim Mosa, a fellow-shopper with whom I fell into conversation, whipped out his ornate Bedouin dagger, which I had admired, and pressed it insistently into my hands — an instance of Arab generosity which surprised and embarrassed me!

4

Easter Monday, April 26th.

After a comfortable night between spotless sheets in the YMCA at HULLA, I rose at dawn and took an early morning stroll along the banks of the Euphrates.

In an openair café at the riverside arabs were holding what appeared to be a religious service: most of the local people belong to the Shia sect, a dissenting and curious branch of Islam: much praying and weeping: a sudden downpour of rain dispersed the congregation, + drove me hurriedly to seek shelter.

This was at 6.30 a.m.  
Breakfasted well, and, the weather clearing, I set out on foot for the ruins of BABYLON.



5

Monday April 26th.

Walking towards Babylon through an avenue of palms and nabuk (cherry trees), I was overtaken by a party of Arabs on donkey-back. One of the band dismounted and insisted on offering me his steed: a kindness that I was not slow in accepting!

And so I rode to Babylon, astride a donkey, on Easter Monday morning.

The ruins seemed even pleasanter on a second viewing: the first occasion was on February 1st of this year.

Explored the little museum. Largely filled by reconstructed German models, and good aerial photographs of the site. Afterwards climbed onto the plateau behind: there were the walls of the



Ishtar Palace, imperishably magnificent, with ancient beasts embossed upon the fresh-seeming brickwork. Descending by a steep flight of steps, I walked between the high walls along the Procession street, imagining myself as Nebuchadnezzar.

And climbing at the further end, came upon the Hanging Gardens, now a sad ruin, and, to a candid eye, more like a disused brick kiln. Finally, walked down into the dell, where stands the Hittite lion, straddling his human victim. Although not indigenous, this monument is, apart from Ishtar's Palace, the only impressive sight in Babylon.

Returning to the rest house, I met Umran, who reminded me of his 2 wives & 10 children, + eventually procured an excellent luncheon

Monday April 26<sup>7</sup>th.

from the local village — arab rounds of bread, liquid cream cheese, hard-boiled eggs. No dates this time, but sweet tea to finish with.

This meal cost me a shilling, a fraction of food prices obtaining in Baghdad.

The usual procedure, of course:

I "Ishged — How much?"

He "Ala kebak! — as you like!"

I "Ishged — please!"

Umran "Kebak — may khalef — it doesn't matter!"

I "Hadha khamseen — here's fifty."

Umran "Mumnoon — much obliged! God Bless you!"

This was followed by entreaties to find his sons jobs in the British Army: unfortunately, hardly in my line! Bade Umran farewell, + hitchhiked regretfully back to BAGHDAD.



BABYLON IN FORTY THREE.

We rattled over corrugated roads  
for two inglorious hours and came at last  
to Babylon. A tiny track conducts  
to where the ruins are: first, a museum  
filled with the toys of archaeology -  
a reconstructed palace, a ziggurat,  
fashioned from plywood at a German's whim,  
a vase or two, some aerial photographs:  
Umran, the arab keeper, parrotwise  
Recites his usual piece....."This model, Sahib,  
was built by Doktor Funk to represent  
the tomb of Empress Toto: here we have  
a splendid statue of the King Axaxes  
unearthed in nineteen ten by Colonel Pratt,  
three thousand years BC.....Yes, Sahib, I knew  
Miss Tonks (kind lady) and Sir Leonard Grubb  
(nice gentleman) I served him sixteen years:  
Sahib, I have twelve children..." *Undsolweiter...*

Wandering out into the bright sunshine  
and blinding sand, we climb a little hill,  
inspect a frescoed wall and then survey  
some rubble brick that was a hanging garden,  
an international tower shrunk to a mound  
where weeds sprout, lizards frolic. Finally,  
Within a hollow, on a modern base,  
completer than the Palace of the Jew,  
Less ravaged than the Sanctuary of the Queen,  
We see the Hittite Lion proudly stand,  
Straddling a prostrate figure. Thus, our guide  
blandly asserts "Symbol of Conquest, Sahib!"  
Nicely he disavows a phallic sign,  
Raising his hands in puritan dismay.  
Is such a lily-gilding purposely  
deceptive or misguided? Who can tell?  
The tour is ended.



8

Continued:-

Let poets speculate,  
Historians rummage, excavators build  
a bubble Babylon inside their brains,  
peopled with tiny kings and serfs and scrolls,  
a living wonder for an antique mind.  
Bloomsbury and Brandenburger Tor contain  
sweat of a thousand sumer artisans,  
crystallized into panels, statues, vases,  
more beautiful than ever poet dreamed,  
and priced beyond the lust of connoisseur.

So drowsed in noonday heat with overgazing  
and overtaxing thin imaginations,  
We turn from scenes of crumbled dynasties  
to modern ruins and future desolation.

*John  
Luttrell*

15.4.43.

JOHN LUTTRELL



C O P Y

THE SOCIETY OF BRITISH AIRCRAFT CONSTRUCTORS

Regional Representative for the  
Middle East and Greece

Colonel E.P.J. Ryan O.B.E.

Cairo

23rd May 1946

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Captain John F. Luttrell of the Intelligence Corps served under my command in Iraq from 1942 to 1945 in the censorship section of General Staff Intelligence. During a considerable period of this time he worked entirely on his own as the British Army Press Censor in Baghdad and as such he was in a position which demanded most careful co-operation and considerable tact in his dealings with the Iraqi Government and newspaper officials. Captain Luttrell had to attempt to please everyone, including the British Embassy officials, the Iraqi and Army authorities: this he did with commendable skill. In fact, whilst he was in charge of this section there was no "incident".

Captain Luttrell always had my fullest confidence as an officer to be trusted to carry out any task assigned to him. He was a quiet methodical and conscientious officer whom I can thoroughly recommend.

signed E.P.J. Ryan

Colonel, late Officer Commanding,  
General Staff Intelligence and Combined  
Intelligence Centre, Iraq and Persia.







## SUMMER MORNING IN BAGHDAD

This is the idlest season of our year  
 When through thin mists the piercing sun discovers  
 On many a roof a pair of drowsy lovers  
 Too sleepy to resent his baleful stare.

From house to house arrogant cocks repeat  
 An echoing reveille through the town:  
 Their harsh alarms, on fragile breezes blown,  
 Disturb the slumbering beggars in the street.

Vaguely the city awakes to familiar strains:  
 First to a cheerful jangling of donkeybells  
 And rhythmic hooves' clipclap: then the music swells  
 With a chorus of pedlars chanting loud refrains.

Whiter the pavements glare as the sun rides higher,  
 Till all Baghdad lies basking in a haze  
 Of shimmering heat: transmuted by its rays,  
 The golden mosque becomes a ball of fire.

Now is the city's uproar pacified  
 By the pervading sun. All labours cease.  
 Their oars relaxed, old boatmen stretched at ease  
 Dream in their craft along the riverside.

Byrd

May 45



After the end of the War from 1946-48 he worked in the Control Commission in Germany initially as a Public Relations Officer. At the age of 32 he undertook an Indoctrination course with the School of Intelligence, Herford at Bremen, coming first. Thereupon he moved into the Political Intelligence section of 13 Niedersachsen Intelligence Staff, compiling background notes on leading German politicians and public figures, writing commentaries on the political scene and collating background reports.

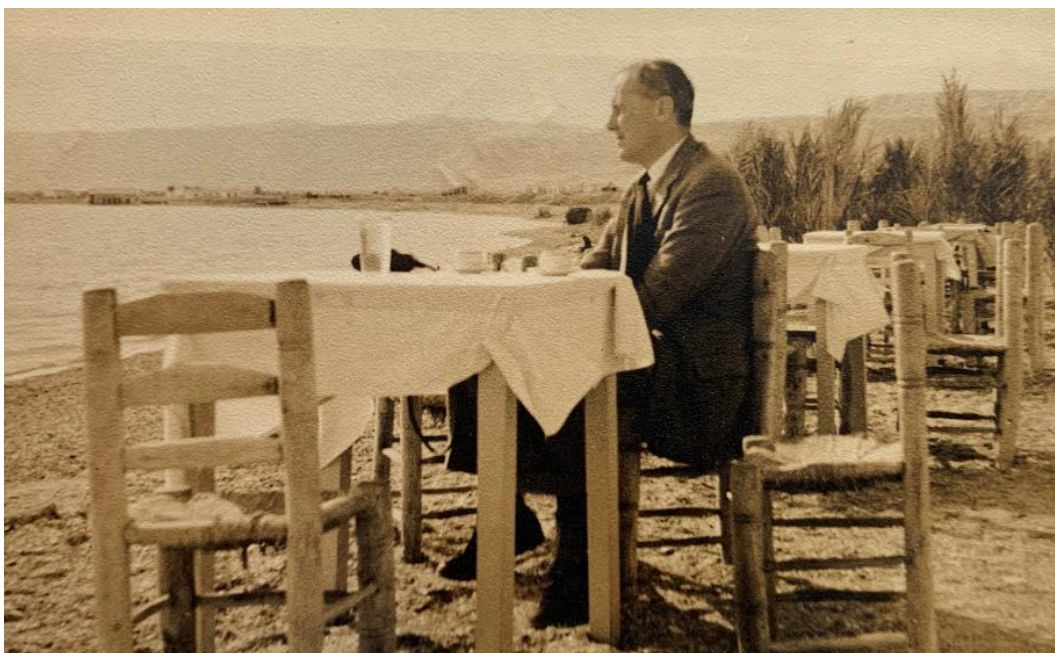


According to a letter of reference “he carried out these duties with painstaking efficiency. Mr. Luttrell has a quietly pleasant personality and a good cultural background. He is well liked by his colleagues and is respected by those Germans with whom he came into contact.”

He then returned to the Middle East with BP working in Iraq and Iran, before joining the Qatar Petroleum Company (later Iraq Petroleum Company) where he worked in public relations in Tripoli, Basrah, Kirkuk before settling in Qatar in 1958, managing relations between the multinational oil giants who were behind IPC and the Qatari royal family.

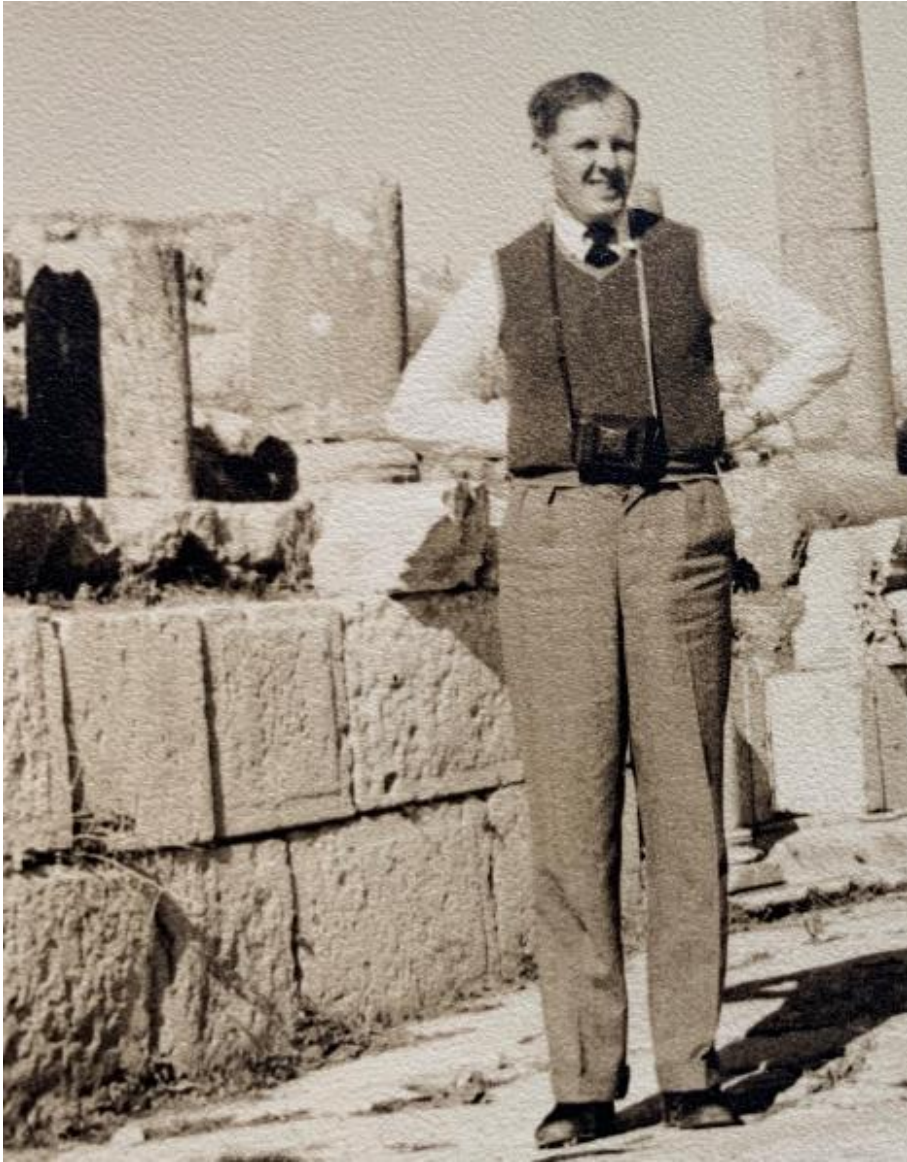


*Prince Philip and Sheikh Ahmad, the ruler of Qatar, at Doha airport.*



*John Luttrell at a café on the shores of the Dead Sea, Christmas 1954.*





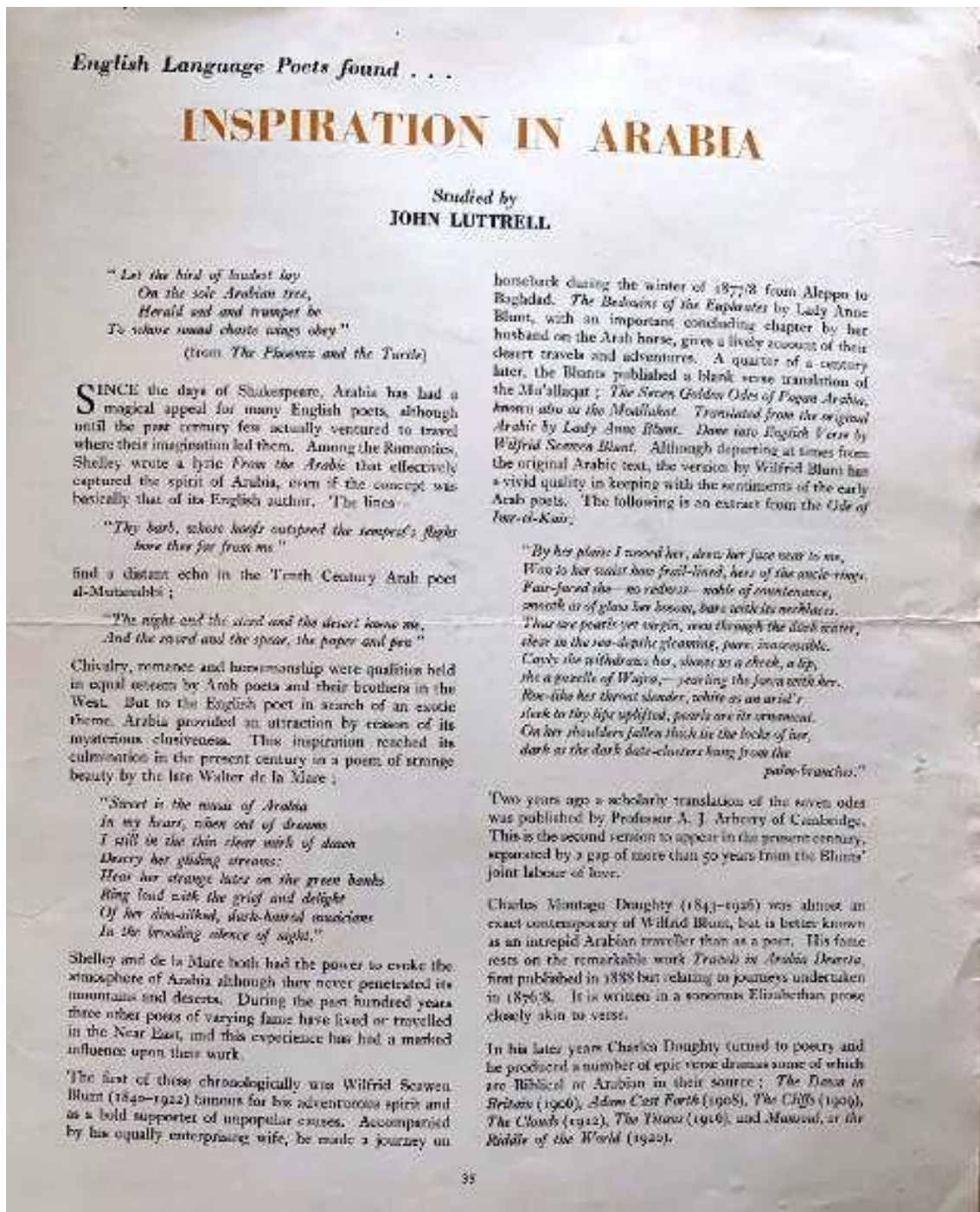
*John Luttrell standing among the ruins of the Roman colonnade in Jerash, Jordan, Christmas 1954.*

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## 4. Language & literature

John was fluent in French and Arabic and also spoke German, Italian and Spanish. He read widely from Shakespeare, Milton, and Charles Lamb through to Graham Greene, Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham and PG Wodehouse.

His favourite poets included TS Eliot and WH Auden. Laurie Lee (author of *Cider & Rosie*) thanked him for some kind comments he wrote. He was also once seated next to Agatha Christie at a literary lunch.





From the patriarchal figure of Charles Doughty, we come to the gentle but intensely lyrical poet James Elroy Flecker, who was born in 1884 and died of consumption in 1915 when he had scarcely entered his full maturity as a writer. Flecker is probably best known for his celebrated play: *Hazoua—The Story of Hazoua of Baghdad and how he came to make the Golden Journey to Samarkand*. Full of humour, local colour and haunting music, the work captures to an extent achieved by few other writers the atmosphere of the Abbasid court of Haroun al Rashid. The final chorus of the play is a resounding triumph in oriental imagery:

"Away, for we are ready to a man!  
Our camels wait the evening and are glad,  
Lead on, O Master of the Caravan,  
Lead on the Merchant-Princes of Baghdad.

...  
Sweet to ride forth at evening from the walls,  
When shadows pass gigantic on the sand,  
And softly through the silence beat the bells  
Along the Golden Road to Samarkand."

In the course of his short life, Flecker spent two years in Beirut as a member of the Consular service. Some of his most memorable lyrics were composed walking in the Lebanese hills and gazing down at the blue waters of the Mediterranean:

"I have seen old ships sail like swans asleep  
Beyond the village which men still call Tyre,  
With laden age o'ercargoed, dipping deep  
For Famagusta and the hidden sea  
That rings black Cyprus with a lake of fire."

Traces of the Arabian theme still appear from time to time in contemporary English poetry, although its appeal is admittedly stronger among romantics like de la Mare than in the later schools of realism. It is interesting to observe that the compilers of the *Faber Book of Twentieth Century Verse* have included in their collection a typical Arab poem by Wilfred Blunt entitled *The Conical Ridge*, as well as selections from Doughty and Flecker. The same anthology contains an excerpt from George Barker's poem *Nens of the World* from which the following lines are taken:

"The seas unfold  
My sleepless eye and saw it weeping  
For the discoloured star. I hear your grave  
Nocturnal lamentation, where, abandoned, far  
You, like Arab in her tent, moan through an evening  
Of wildernesses. O what are you grieving for?"

In recent years Arabic poetry has tended to discard its time-honoured patterns of theme and metric in favour of newer forms of expression resembling those of contemporary European poetry. This evolution coincides with social and economic changes that are today transforming the Middle East. If a channel of communication can be established between poets of the Arab countries and those of the West, this may lead to a two-way flow of ideas beneficial to both civilisations. By this means the Arabian theme, current in Elizabethan days and carried by romantic poets down to the Twentieth Century, may continue to flourish in new forms adapted to our present era.

#### Some of the Books mentioned in the Article

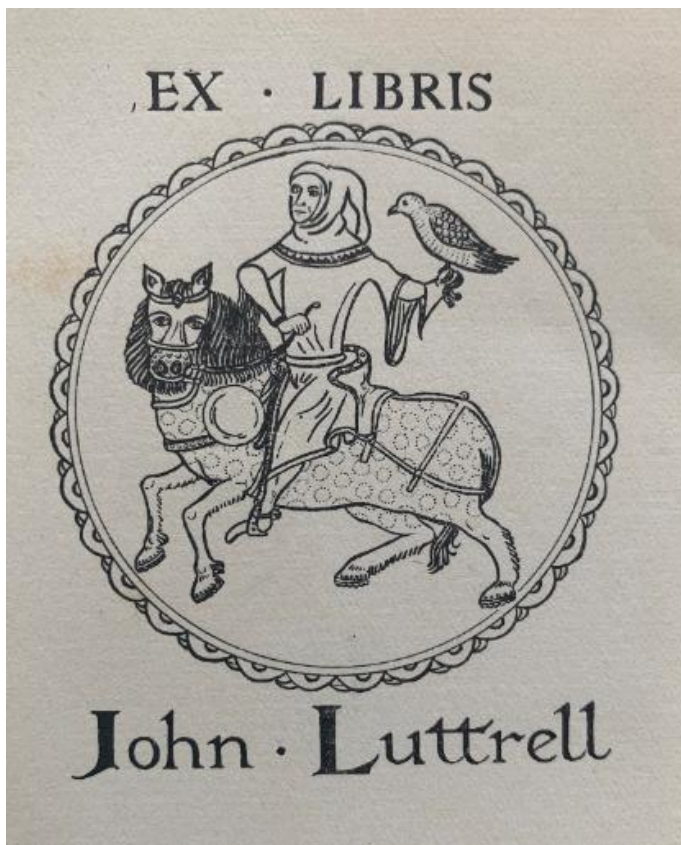
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Lady Anne Blunt: <i>The Bedouins of the Euphrates</i> , 2 vols.<br>John Murray 1879         | James Elroy Flecker: <i>Hazoua: a Play in Five Acts</i><br>Hensemann 1917                          |
| Lady Anne and W. S. Blunt: <i>The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia</i> Chiswick Press 1903 | J. Heath-Stubbs and D. Wright: <i>The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Verse</i> Faber & Faber 1953 |
| C. M. Doughty: <i>Travels in Arabia Deserta</i> , 2 vols.<br>Jonathan Cape 1936             | A. J. Arbery: <i>The Seven Odes</i> George Allen & Unwin 1957                                      |

#### AN APOLOGY

Due to circumstances beyond our control it has not been possible for recent issues of *Iraq Petroleum* to be published on their scheduled date; but subscribers may always rest assured that, when such delays are caused, they have not been forgotten and that the magazine will reach them at the earliest possible time.

Article by John Luttrell published in *Iraq Petroleum* magazine.





*John Luttrell's book plate, its motif drawn from the 14th century Luttrell Psalter, below.*



## 5. Photography & Art

John took photographs wherever he travelled. He also had a strong interest in art, particularly 20th century painters such as Modigliani, Augustus John, Stanley Spencer and Paul Nash. A framed print of John Piper's Entrance to a Wood hung above the Kuwait chest in our hallway. He also collected mementoes from the Middle East such as David Roberts prints, Persian rugs, Muscat shells, bronze coffee pots and a hookah.



*A hookah collected by John Luttrell*



*John Luttrell's Movado Ermeto travel watch.*

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## 6. Personal Life

His years abroad left him homesick, the sense of 'nostos' inspiring again to express this in a poem. Returning to England after the War he fell in love in 1946 and again in 1951 inspiring some beautiful poems.

The dance

Heaven is my silent witness that you lay  
Relaxed in innocent slumber on my breast  
Two precious hours before the break of day:  
And as you slept I prayed, that you might  
rest

For ever in that perfect attitude,  
So calm and peaceful and inviolate:  
Sheltered within my arms against the rude  
Assaults of life and cruelties of fate.

But happiness is transient and must die:  
a delicate dream engendered in the night  
Within under the sun's intensity  
And mocks with disillusion our delight:

So you at last awaking out of sleep  
Shattered a dream that I had hoped to keep.

August 17th 46.

Swans

One summer morning as we walked beside  
The muddy Thames in Chelsea there appeared  
A convoy of white swans upon the tide  
Moving in proud aloofness. As I stared

Upon that strange and lovely spectacle  
Against a background of fresh-painted ships  
A sudden urge to frame a parallel  
Hovered unspoken on my silent lips.

O how exantly were their several charms  
Mirrored in my companion, grace for grace:  
Their curving necks here, throat and slender  
arms  
Their downy breasts the satin of her face.

Too long I toyed with the comparison:  
My love grew restless and the swans were  
gone.

23 Sept 46

### The Visit

So once again the brilliant sun has shone  
out of a cloudless sky, and from its bed  
the drooping rose has lifted up its head  
while every bird sang out in unison.

Why is it that your coming can alone  
Banish the rain and make the mists recede,  
Which faster falls and still more thickly  
spread  
Upon the gloomy instant you are gone?

Like the pale moon that from a dizzy height  
Causes obedient tides to ebb and flow  
Is your magnetic influence over me:

Your soft arrival fills me with delight  
Too happy to endure, and when you go  
My heart sinks back into despondency.

16 Sept 46.

### The Sun

This sun, which shines so brightly on the  
sheds its same radiance on my absent <sup>to n</sup> love:  
May its pervasive influence pouring down  
On both our bodies make her conscious off

My no less ardent passion: may she feel  
From its warm beams a waking of desire,  
And may those chill repressions that  
congeal  
Her maiden heart be melted by its fire.

Discard my love the veil of modesty,  
In such surrender there is no disgrace:  
Expose your beauty to his flaming eye,  
And yield your body to his firm embrace.

Thus, if no man may pluck so shy a flower,  
the golden sun shall be your paramour.

August 19th 46.





Novar 1951

These are the gold autumnal days  
When summer's lease forecloses  
And woodlands in their warming blaze  
Outvie the dying roses.

The wind blows cold on Fyrish hill  
Where wander secret deer,  
And he who climbs its summit will  
Find certain beauty there.

Down to the Firth the pinewoods sweep  
In green magnificence,  
Whilst ling and leafy bracken creep  
Beyond the forest ~~xxxx~~ fence.

This simple song for you alone  
in solitude I sing,  
A seed on Autumn breezes blown  
To ripen in the Spring.

Though fair the hills around Novar,  
Its forests and its farms,  
Your beauty is my guiding star  
And your undying charms.

October 1951.

### The Dream

A dream is a deep cave where the lost soul  
Meanders, trailing no backguiding thread:  
A strange labyrinth lit by flickering candles  
Held in the inflexible fingers of the dead.

And now the dripping tunnel widens out  
Into a gorgeous palace chamber where  
Droop giant chandelier-like stalactytes  
And a cold beauty fills the atmosphere.

Better that they who penetrate this womb  
Of time's oblivion never should again  
Emerge to meet the brightness of the sun  
And feel upon their eyes its searing pain.

For he who dreams too deeply and too long  
Of power and love, the guiding reins of life,  
Shall wake to find his girl a wrinkled hag  
With toothless jawbones cackling at his grief.

## CRYSTAL-GAZING

Open your eyes, my dear, and let me gaze  
Deeply into those mirrors of your soul:  
For like prophetic crystals they reveal  
Your secret thoughts and in most mysteries.

Sometimes in their reflection I perceive  
Unfathomable sorrow, and at times  
Passionate pleasure: now the licking flames  
Of anger, now the gentleness of love.

But mostly is their liquid beauty stored  
With a serene and sympathetic peace,  
That lends a subtle radiance to your face  
And pleads with the beholder to be shared.

In June 1959 while on leave to the UK he was introduced to Lady Elizabeth Shirley, eldest daughter of Earl Ferrers, at a party in London. Whether it was the Denman & Goddard suits (James Bond's tailor) or a shared background in military intelligence (Betty having worked on the Enigma machine code breaking) it must have been love at first sight for within a month they were engaged. They married on 24 October that year at All Saint's, Brailsford, Derbyshire. No one knew how to pronounce Qatar so they were wished 'health and happiness in the gutter.' They honeymooned in Venice.







In Doha they lived in a bungalow provided by the Iraq Petroleum Company. I was born in England in June 1961 but my father was unable to get leave till December. My mother and I would spend much of the year in Doha but would often return to the UK for months on end, particularly during the summer, staying at my grandmother's home in Shirley, Derbyshire.



*Home in Doha, Qatar.*





*John, Betty and Robert in the garden at Doha, with Saleem and D'Souza.*

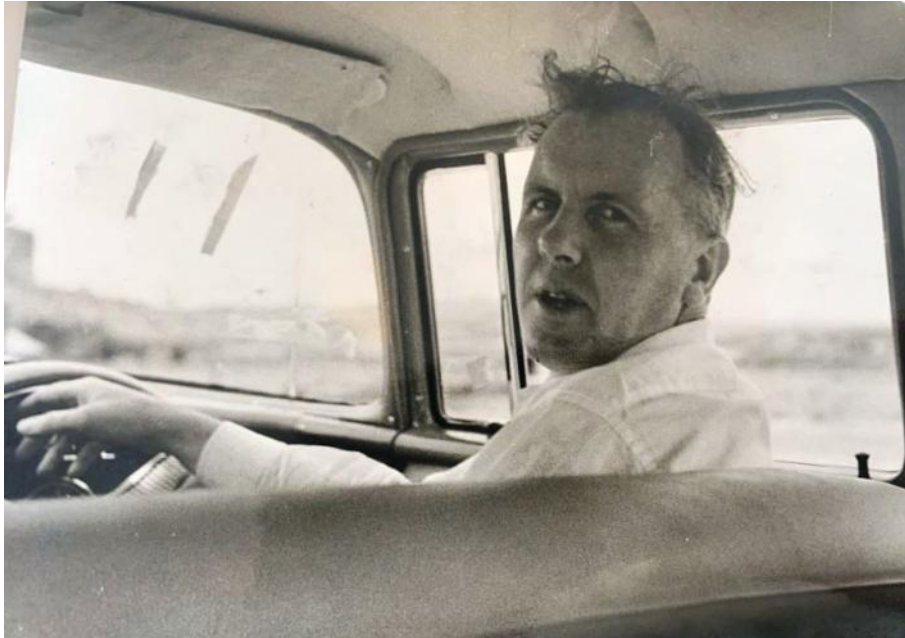
We used to fly B.O.A.C (British Overseas Airways Corporation - otherwise known as 'Better On a Camel') and break the journey with an overnight stop off in Beirut, Tehran or Abu Dhabi. I remember being taught how to order an egg boiled for 4 and a half minutes in Farsi.



John's job involved spending a lot of time with the Qatari royal family and he was often invited to the palace. On one trip he happened to admire a very smart Philips wireless and in accordance with conventions of Arab hospitality it was promptly delivered to our home, to his acute embarrassment. He had a cosmopolitan group of friends including Danish archaeologists and there was quite a social life for expats including parties in fancy dress.

We had a Pye radiogram which instilled a lifelong love of Flanders & Swann and With The Beatles (the only pop record they ever owned).

While he was at work I attended The Shell school. Weekends we would spend at the beach or meandering through the Souk to buy nougat. Sometimes he would drive us in a blue Austin Westminster to Umm Sai'd about 30 miles out of Doha where there was a large swimming pool.



*On the way to the large swimming pool at Umm Sai'd in the Austin Westminster.*

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## 7. Return to England

We returned to England in 1968, a few years after my mother had had a stillborn daughter. It must have been terribly sad for both of them. We bought a house in Itchen Abbas, near Winchester in preparation for my education.

Having left Iraq Petroleum John managed to pick up occasional work as a translator in Arabic and French at the American Embassy in London for the Foreign Broadcasts Information Service. From 1972 to 1974 he helped with the development of the Qatar National Museum, as a consultant to Michael Rice & Co.

He was a member of the Travellers Club, the English Speaking Union, the Anglo-Arab Association, the Royal Society for Asian Affairs and the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding.

In the mid 1970s John was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. His physical health deteriorated quickly and he lost a great deal of weight but not his mental acuity. As he would shake too much I would hold *The Times* for him and read out the clues to the cryptic crossword, which he would decipher (without the benefit of seeing the puzzle) and he would then stammer out the solution.

I would also help shave him in the morning, trying to time it between tremors so that I did not nick him. Eventually, the shakes got so bad we had to resort to an electric razor.

Around this time he also enrolled in the Open University where he studied Philosophy.





*Home in Itchen Abbas, near Winchester.*

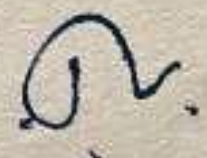
He bore his illness like a Stoic and never complained. He passed away in September 1985. In his own quiet way he left his mark on those who knew him. Among the many kind condolences my mother received this was typical:

“I knew your husband about a year some 45 years ago...I had many chats with John and he told me about his time in South Africa and the Luttrells of Dunster Castle... John was such a fine man.”

BESIDE THE TIGRIS 45

Behold the brown-skinned bathers in the river,  
Small Arab urchins plunging through the tide  
With bold abandon: now emerge to slither  
Ecstatically down the steep muddy side:  
Now leaping from the bridge, now playing hide-  
and-seek among moored boats: their sport is never  
Ending from early dawn to eventide.  
Unconscious hedonists, who know not whether  
Wars rage in other lands, <sup>or</sup> ~~and~~ far away  
Bomb-twisted cities writhe in agony  
As Death spreads his contagion everywhere:  
Here only breezes agitate the air,  
And Death is meaningless to boys who play  
Innocently, under a cloudless sky.

June 45







*John and Betty, Earl Ferrers (Betty's brother), Countess Ferrers, and the Rev. Maurice Robson.*

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