



BRITISH COUNCIL

BRITISH COUNCIL: activities in Iran 1942-79. The first British Council representative was appointed to Iran in 1942. The priority was English language teaching, and by 1944 the Council was teaching over 4,000 students. By 1948 the Council had opened six provincial institutes with libraries in which the teaching could be further expanded in Isfahan, Tabrīz, Rašt, Mašhad, Shiraz, and Tehran. In 1952 two of these provincial institutes were closed for financial reasons. The annual report for that year stated, “The Council’s work in Persia is regarded as important but the rate of exchange makes it expensive.” In 1952 the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute caused the Council to close down the remaining provincial institutes together with the representation.

The Council returned to Iran in 1955 when Derek Traversi was appointed representative. The Council soon got back to its previous strength. The cultural convention was signed on 6 May 1959 to promote friendly interchange and understanding through academic, scientific, and cultural activity, for which the Council was appointed by the British Foreign Office to be its principal agent.

The most outstanding achievement was the British Cultural Festival in October 1977. Ballet and drama were represented by the Sadlers Wells Royal Ballet and the Prospect Theatre Company with their production of Hamlet. Music included recitals by the scholars, the Aeolian Quartet, and John Ogdon, both in Tehran and in the provinces. John Ogdon and Norman del Mar appeared with the Tehran Symphony Orchestra and Heather Harper and Denis McCaldin



with the Iranian national chamber orchestra. Of the exhibitions, British Travelers to Iran, Ceramics and Textiles, Recent British Art, Golden Treasures of London, British Posters 1870-1976, and a children's book display were particularly noteworthy. The festival also included showings of recent British feature films in Tehran and other cities. A seminar was held at the University of Shiraz on Anglo-Iranian relations in literature, art, and history with Sir Roger Strevens as chairman. The festival concluded dramatically with a display of massed bands by four British military bands followed by a football match between Manchester United and an Iranian National XI in the presence of the Crown Prince. The response to the festival was enthusiastic. The British Council's Chairman and Lady Troughton attended for the final week. No British festival of this kind had ever been held in Iran before. It was also the largest cultural festival that Britain had ever staged overseas.

Between 1942 and 1978 the Council brought nearly 10,000 students and visitors from Iran to Britain. In 1978 the majority of these were studying medical, agricultural, and educational subjects. In the period 1948-75 188 Iranians received British Council scholarships.

In the 1970s the Council was engaged, at the request of the Iranian authorities, in a number of projects connected with the development of education and training in Iran. These included a major program for the teaching of English to employees of the Oil Services Company of Iran in Ahvāz, Ābādān, and Kārg Island; the development of a faculty of nautical studies for the University of Baluchistan which was designed to train officers for the Iranian merchant fleet; and training in Britain of veterinary surgeons for the Veterinary Organization of Iran (Vetorg). Training was arranged and provided by the British Ministry of Agriculture.

In June 1978 the Council's representation in Iran was among the top three of the Council's representations in the world. The Council had offices and centers in Tehran, Ahvāz, Isfahan, Mašhad, Shiraz, and Tabrīz, with a total of 18 London-appointed staff, 98 local staff, 53 London-recruited English teachers, and 38 Council-recruited staff working in Iranian institutions. This growth of Council activity was abruptly halted in late 1978 by the political events prior to the departure of the shah in January 1979 and the establishment of Islamic Revolutionary Government a month later. During 1979 the remaining provincial institutes and the Council representation in Tehran were closed. The last Council representative in Iran was John Hanson.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

[This article is based on information supplied by the British Council.]