

The John Murray Expedition to the Indian Ocean (1933-1934)

On 3 September 1933 His Egyptian Majesty's Ship *Mabahiss*, a 138' long research trawler, left Alexandria for a nine-month cruise which was to take her through the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the north-western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman. During the Cruise the ship worked 209 scientific stations and collected data and material which formed the basis of a long series of reports published by the British Museum (Natural History) over a period of more than 30 years.

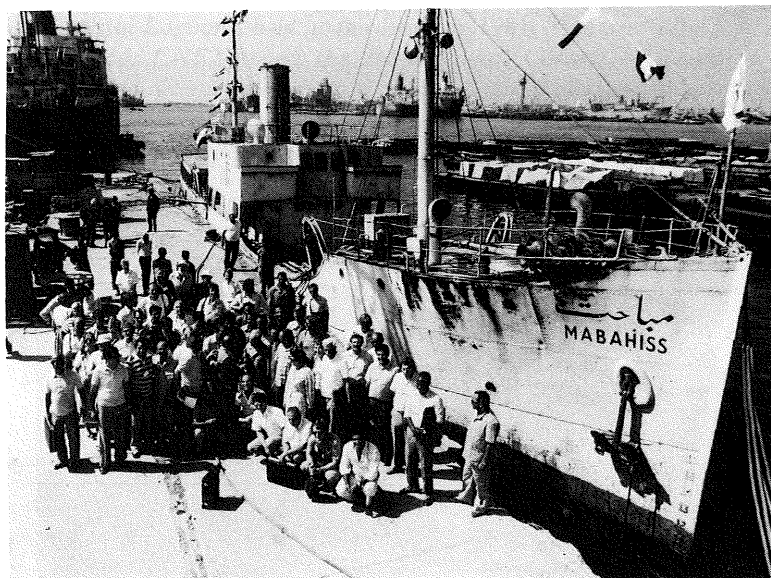
The Expedition was financed from a bequest made by the eminent British oceanographer and Challenger scientist, Sir John Murray, on his death in 1914 and was originally conceived as an all-British venture. However, difficulties in obtaining a suitable vessel had the happy result that it ultimately became an Anglo-Egyptian affair, with a British scientific leader, Lt. Col. R.B. Seymour Sewell, and a British captain, K. N. MacKenzie, but with two young Egyptians among the scientists and an almost entirely Egyptian crew.

Prior to the expedition the Indian Ocean was certainly the least studied oceanic area on earth, having been entirely missed or visited only briefly by all of the major oceanographic expeditions and never having been regularly sampled except by RIMS Investigator of the Marine Survey of India. Even after the return of *Mabahiss* and the publication of the results it could hardly be considered as well-known, and the realization that the region required much more intensive study ultimately resulted in the International Indian Ocean Expedition in the early 1960s. Nevertheless, the John Murray Expedition added significantly to the available knowledge of the area, particularly in the fields of sea-bed topography and geology, sea-water physics and chemistry, and biology, resulting in stimulating inceptive ideas for oceanography in general.

For the north-western Indian Ocean region in particular, one of the expedition's most significant results was in generating oceanographic interest in Egypt and contributing indirectly to the establishment of the Department of Oceanography in the University of Alexandria. It was entirely appropriate, therefore, that in September 1983 an international symposium was convened in Alexandria by the Department of Oceanography to mark the 50th anniversary of the John Murray/*Mabahiss* Expedition. Some 35 papers were presented, mostly attempting to review the current state of knowledge of the north-western Indian Ocean in the fields of physical and chemical oceanography, marine pollution, shallow and deep-water biology, geology and geophysics, and exploitable living and non-living resources. The proceedings of this symposium will be published in 1984 as a supplement to *Deep-Sea Research* under the general editorship of Dr. M. V. Angel.

Despite the significance of the expedition, details of its background and conduct are not well known in the oceanographic community, partly because Seymour Sewell published only a very brief account in the *Scientific Reports*. To rectify this, Unesco will publish a commemorative volume in 1984, consisting mainly of Seymour Sewell's previously unpublished narrative of the cruise, but with additional information on the origins and organization of the expedition and on the principal participants.

A. L. Rice
Member of the Scientific Board



Mabahiss, 5 septembre 1983. Dans le port d'Alexandrie, avec les participants au symposium du 50^e anniversaire (photo : M. V. Angel).
Mabahiss, 5 September 1983. In the Western Harbour, Alexandria, with participants in the 50th anniversary symposium (photo : M. V. Angel).