

Secretary in Aden who stayed long after the British left

Audrey Sullivan, 94

Audrey Sullivan was in her early thirties when she landed in the port city of Aden on the Arabian peninsula. She was there to provide secretarial support for the signals section of the British telecommunications company Cable & Wireless. Her posting would coincide with the Aden Emergency, yet Audrey remained firmly in post long after the British left, enjoying the city's heat and bustle — a far cry from her rural origins in a village outside Nottingham — with her flat overlooking the long Ma'ala Straight avenue. It would be another 14 years before she left the Middle East.

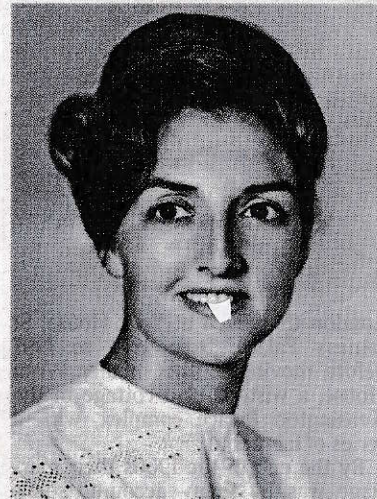
Audrey's work would take her to neighbouring capitals such as Damascus and Beirut, then known as the "Paris of the Middle East", which is where she met Victor, a Lebanese-US citizen. He was working for the National Cash Register company, which would later expand into computers and credit systems. They

married in 1966 in a Greek Orthodox church in Beirut and two years later had their son, Richard. He went on to become a professor of cancer and global health at King's College London.

For the next six years the family based themselves in Aden, with the odd postings to Greece as well as Syria, Mombasa and Djibouti, and after the British withdrawal in late 1967 Audrey remained under the protection of the Greek consulate.

Yet the stability of family life came to an abrupt end in 1974 when Victor, along with two work colleagues, was arrested for espionage by the recently formed People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

While his colleagues were released shortly afterwards, Victor remained in prison and was paid regular visits by his wife and six-year-old son. A year into the sentence, Audrey and Richard also found themselves at the mercy of the government when they were told to leave the country immediately. It was 1976, and with most of their possessions remaining



Audrey Sullivan returned to Britain and became head matron of a school

in Aden, they returned to Britain to stay for the next 18 months with Audrey's sister outside Winchester, Hampshire. Victor was released soon after but the marriage did not

withstand the toll of incarceration, and the couple separated.

Audrey Sullivan was born in Nottingham in 1930, the seventh of eight children. Her father, Daniel Sullivan, had survived the entirety of the First World War and received a Military Medal; her mother Alice (née Davy) raised the family. Educated locally, and a Land Girl in her teens, Audrey left school at 15 and worked in a photographer's studio before taking a secretarial course. She moved to London where her vivacity and sharp mind caught the eye of the British diplomat and Arabist Ivor Lucas (obituary, June 16, 2018). It was Lucas who suggested she move to Aden with Cable and Wireless.

After returning to Britain and newly divorced, Audrey found positions running households in the area, including the Buckinghamshire house of Hermione, Countess of Ranfurly, who became a good friend. When Richard reached the age of ten she became the matron of his school, Amesbury School, in Hindhead, Surrey. She repeated the role as head

matron at Lord Wandsworth College in Long Sutton, Hampshire, which not only educated her son but also provided her with a small cottage. It was a job she loved, and she stayed for 12 years — long after her son left — an eager observer of the career and family paths of "her boys".

A sociable figure, Audrey settled in Hartley Wintney, Hampshire, where she made use of her entertaining days in Aden and put on gatherings for herself and her son's friends.

While the birth of her granddaughter, Alice, put paid to the idea of retiring to the Middle East, she retained a lifelong nostalgia for "the sands of Arabia" and remained proud to call herself "the last British woman out of Aden".

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