

# Phillip Mawrey Father of the early British Chamber

At a time our current president was but a mere twinkle in his father's eye, a young Englishman was sitting in the rear of a BOAC Argonaut with two other passengers in the three seats reserved for in-flight recreation. On their seemingly endless journey from London via Bahrain and Bombay they had passed the time playing cards, drinking and chatting, each wondering what their new life in the tropics would hold.

## A FOREWORD BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION



In publishing this first issue of the UKMRA Bulletin, many of the members of the Association will have been together for the past 9 years since a small handful of us got together in 1965 to form the nucleus of what is now perhaps the strongest association of its kind both in influence and numbers anywhere in the world.

The Association has passed through many phases, although we cannot hide the fact that some five or six years ago, through a certain amount of apathy and possibly some lack of purposeful action, it nearly collapsed. It seemed to be on the verge of going to sleep. However, this was short-lived and with the election of a new vigorous Committee, followed by a new vigorous Committee in Singapore, as a Registered Society in Singapore, we went on from strength to strength.

By far the larger majority of the Members have been in the Association for several years and they need no reminding of the objects of the UKMRA. To the newer Members, the objects as laid down in our charter and in our rules, which they will have read, may seem quite straight forward and so they are. The greatest value however in being a Member of the UKMRA, is the innumerable advantages for the 82 Members to have one with the others, to exchange information, to discuss trade developments and above all to assist each other in the promotion of British trade in general in the Far East territories. Of this co-operation between Members there has been more than ample evidence over the recent years and this has not only benefited the Members themselves but also the British trade in the Far East. It is the UKMRA which has been described and rightly so, as the most important body of British Trade Representatives in the Far East area.

This is a reputation both enviable and precious. As long as we continue to have the support of the Association, we shall continue to be in a friendly concourse, devoid of any selfish motives and at all times willing to co-operate one with the other, the UKMRA will continue to prosper. Our united efforts during recent months have proved the value of an organisation such as ours, even had such proof been needed. We shall continue to uphold what we consider just and fair in respect of British trade, at the same time helping one another when it is vitally the same thing.

PHILIP S. MAWREY,  
President.

## First issue of the UKMRA bulletin in 1965

When the aircraft touched down at Kallang, Reckitt and Coleman's new regional manager for Asia felt the rush of humid air. This would be an integral part of his life for the next sixteen years and Phillip Mawrey sensed the beginning of a new adventure.

Consumed by the tropical heat, Phillip's mind momentarily flashed back to him enlisting in the Navy to spend the war years on board a frigate and his surviving at least one attack that found him being hauled out of the freezing sea in his lifejacket.

The outstretched hand of the monocolled outgoing regional manager welcomed him to Kallang and to Singapore and after a few pleasantries they dove straight to Raffles Hotel. This was where, except for the brief Japanese

interlude, the monocolled manager had lived for the last 45 years. His first words of advice to newly arrived Mawrey were "you really must first find yourself a decent hotel in which to live. No one really lives in houses here you know."

After a few weeks the monocolled manager checked out of Raffles for the first and last time and Phillip found himself alone in charge of an Asia stretching from Japan and China down to Malaya and

Indonesia, with brands such as Brasso, Cherry Blossom, Dettol, Disprin and Harpic to manage. In the first twelve months Phillip routed his marketers three times. He decided the challenge was surmountable, convinced Reckitt and Coleman to buy a house at 9 Campden Park and at long last sent the cable which would bring his family to join him in Singapore. Like all "number ones" in Singapore at that time, Phillip quickly became a member of the

only three acceptable clubs in town - The Tanglin Club, The Singapore Club and The Royal Singapore Golf Club. In the fifties life revolved around the Club pools at weekends, with occasional visits to the top two hotels The Adelphi and the Seaview. Raffles was seen as strictly for the tourists and business visitors. Amongst their growing circle of close friends was a Mrs Lee, one of whose sons had recently graduated in Law from the UK and who appeared destined for bigger things.

Life for four years was the usual mixture of travel, hard work and fun, but by 1974 Phillip realised the business world in Asia was changing but the attitude of the British government was not, in particular that of the Board of Trade.

British trading companies who had made the effort to establish themselves in Asia were spending all of their time wrestling with complex and punitive tariffs and business was simply getting harder to do.

So Phillip arranged a meeting at the Tanglin Club with four other number ones - Messrs Glanlaming from Lewis Berger, Whiston from Uligate, Grier from Jensen and Nicholson and Rainer from BOAC. Together the five of them agreed "...we need to create some form of association to be the forum for discussing trade issues in Asia and to keep government and principals alike informed upon these matters..."

So the United Kingdom Manufacturers' Representatives Association was born with five members and Phillip as its president; an office he would hold until his retirement nine years later when the Association had grown to more than fifty members.

Perhaps the most fitting tribute to Phillip and his role in the UKMRA can be found in a farewell message from his successor John Emery, the then number one of Tube Investments, in the Association's bulletin in September 1965.

"Phillip was president of the Association continuously for nine years. Members, old and new alike persistently re-elected him in recognition of his abiding enthusiasm for, and interest in the aims and aspirations of the UKMRA. When discussing the UKMRA recently with an august percentage of one of the Merchant Houses, his daughter demanded to know what it is and whether daddy belonged to it. "Lord no", replied father, "that's a closed shop and Phillip Mawrey it's steward."

Perhaps there is some justification for the analogy, for the essential purpose of the Association is to serve the best interests of home-based British manufacturers and none has guarded these interests so zealously, and indeed passionately, as did Phillip. Members hardly need reminding of his initiative during last year's "textile crisis" and his forthright manner in impressing some of our official visitors about the importance of Britain's commercial interests in this area. Some members too will remember with gratitude help received from Phillip in getting it across to their employers that gin is no longer ten cents a peg, and that substantial cost-of-living allowances are really necessary in Singapore.

I can recall occasions over the years when attendance at meetings was so small, and interest so weak that there was talk of abandonment. But, however bad the situation, it was invariably saved by Phillip Mawrey's unflagging enthusiasm and hard work. His leadership of the Association over the years has earned him a well-deserved life membership. Equally, an apt unofficial title might be "Father of the UKMRA" as I am sure we shall all remember him."

The Chamber visited Phillip at his Oxfordshire home in early December last year. The consummate gentleman in his nineties sent his gardener to meet us off the train from Paddington

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and after a short ten-minute journey we turned the last village corner to see an immaculately dressed Phillip standing by the entrance to his Thames-side home to greet us. We spent the next couple of hours taking tea and biscuits in the morning room as Phillip took us on a fascinating illustrated tour of working and social life in Singapore in the 50s and early 60s. The only interruption was Phillip repeatedly springing to his feet and insisting he put the kettle on for more tea.

"When I was in my early 50s I was called back to head office. They were concerned about my health and suggested early retirement. The offer included paying off my mortgage and keeping the company car which they would ship back for me. It seemed quite a fair and reasonable offer to me so it was accepted"

That was nearly 40 years ago...

Chris Claridge



Phillip Mawrey aged 91 at his home in Oxford