

A legacy of history



Jackie Macadam

Jackie Macadam meets the founders of the Balfour Project.

“WE made a film about Britain in Palestine 1917-1948. It was launched in 2014. In April 2023 it was put on YouTube and it has had over two million views since then, most of them post- October 7 2023. There is a hunger to know why this war (in Israel and Gaza) started.”

These are the words of Monica and Roger Spooner, two of the founders of ‘Balfour Project’, a charity created to highlight Britain’s record in Palestine before, during, and after the Mandate, effectively from 1840 to 1948, to the present day. Through education and advocacy, they work to advance equal rights for all in Palestine/ Israel regardless of race or creed and achieve greater public awareness of Britain’s current and historic responsibilities in Palestine/Israel.

“Our vision is to progress peace with justice, and ensure security and equal rights for both Palestinians and Israelis,” says Monica.

“For many years Roger was on the committee of British Arab Exchanges (BAX), which organised student exchanges between various Arab countries and the UK.” He says: “There was mention of the Balfour Declaration, but I knew little about it.

“Being invited to Jordan in 2008 and seeing the exhibition of the McMahon-Hussein correspondence had a major effect on me. I had never heard that Britain

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promised Palestine to the Arabs in 1915. But Jordan brought other experiences too. We saw a copy of the Mesha Stele writing of a Moabite king being told by his God to destroy Israel. Sounding much like Joshua but from the other side. We had never heard of Omri whose son, Mesha was destroying. The British museum states that King Omri founded the Kingdom of Israel in 880 BCE. Asking a friend, a biblical scholar, why Omri was barely mentioned in the Bible she replied: ‘He was a non-believer so he got a bad press.’”

Returning from their first visit, Monica experienced a surprise question: ‘How will Britain mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration’. A surprise because as she read the words of the Balfour Declaration, she realised that they reneged on the British promise made two years before to

create an Arab state, including Palestine. She wondered why Britain should mark the centenary. Where did this significant question come from? It felt like a gift, and the couple followed where it led.

The couple explain: “Six friends had a weekend meeting in 2009 discussing the diverse and contradictory promises Britain had made to a variety of leaders between 1015 and 1948 about Palestine – promises including support for an Arab state, a secret agreement to divvy up the Middle East between Britain, France and Russia, and even a promise to the League of Nations that Britain would prepare to ready Palestine for independence, but failed to do so. We decided there was more to investigate. As Monica kept asking the question, several people offered to work with us. At our first meeting in 2011 we

decided to set up a web site which is now a major repository on Britain in Palestine, at <https://balfourproject.org>.

Roger adds: "The Balfour Project asks the Government and people of the United Kingdom to:

- Acknowledge Britain's historical role in shaping 20th and 21st century Israel/Palestine, particularly in light of the Balfour Declaration and the policies of the British Mandate;
- Support Palestinians and Israelis in building a peaceful future based on equal rights, justice and security for all;
- Work for British Government recognition of the State of Palestine.

"Having not previously known anything about Britain's colonial activities in the Middle East we felt a need to try and pass on some of the things we were learning. Would our government act differently if our MPs knew more of our colonial history and not just the history of the victor? Monica's question: How will Britain mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration? was the question that had brought us together."

The Balfour Project is still developing, with some feeling it is more relevant now than ever before.

"We are appointing an Executive Director," says Roger. "The project continues to evolve and the need to educate our MPs and get the government to take action such as recognising Palestine and stopping arms sales to Israel remain high priority. But to get them to take such steps MPs need to learn about the Middle East.

"How do we begin to get this information to our schools and our Churches, as well as to our MPs?"

Monica says that this journey and creating a charity is something she never imagined she would do – yet it is something her faith has helped her to do.

"I was shy from childhood, constantly believing I couldn't do many things, and lost much self-esteem. At 52, I was crippled by shyness at a conference in Kenya. Early in the morning, the young lady leading the session suggested being quiet and listening 'in case God had anything to say to us'. In that moment it was like a voice saying to

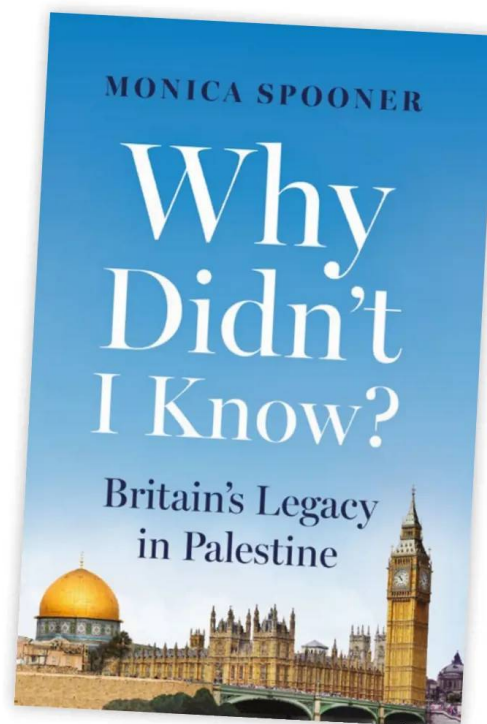


Audience at Westminster Central Hall – Centenary of Balfour Declaration 2017

me 'shyness is your nature, but inferiority and self-concern are sin. You deal with the sin, and I will deal with your nature.' In a flash I felt healed and shared it with others. I can only say that I believe this was God's healing. It has held good ever since, and without this I could not have played the part I did in developing the Balfour Project!

"Since then, I have been asked to speak publicly about the Project. Instinctively I said no! But as the person asking me waited patiently for many weeks for a reply, eventually I felt convinced I should do so, and did successfully. Did he pray for me? I don't know, but I'm very grateful to him. An even greater challenge was to introduce the event marking the Centenary of the Balfour Declaration in Westminster Central Hall before 1200 people! Very reluctantly I agreed as I was the first chair of trustees when Balfour Project became a charity. But until three weeks before the event, I had no idea what to say. Waking in the night, I had thoughts chasing around my mind and felt I should write them down. I scribbled them and didn't dare to look for three days. With one word altered, that was exactly what I said on the night! It felt very strange – was I saying what God wanted me to?

"I had huge expectations for that centenary event. I expected something dramatic like the British government would own up, acknowledge our colonial sins and recognise Palestine before it is too late. But this didn't happen! Was I fooled all along,



or do I accept that God's plan and timing are not mine? I won't live to see the justice and healing that I so long for. Others may see it. However, Balfour Project has grown and become effective in raising national awareness of British colonial deceit in 'the Holy Land' and challenges Britain to act and prevent the loss of all Palestinians, the original Christians." ■

Monica's book about the history of Britain's role and in their efforts to raise awareness, is called, "Why Didn't I know? Britain's legacy in Palestine" is available from Troubador Publishing for £12.99 and £6.99 (eBook).