

100 years of communication

ROSL President Lord Luce considers the scope and achievements of *Overseas* as we celebrate its centenary

It is a great achievement for the Royal Over-Seas League that we are able to celebrate the centenary of Overseas, and I congratulate Miranda Moore and her team on their decision to mark the occasion with a centenary section in this issue.

Sir Evelyn Wrench, our Founder, was one of the most farsighted internationalists and communicators of his generation. As an experienced journalist, he grasped the opportunity to launch this magazine, in December 1915, to become the 'shop window' of the aspirations of the club, founded five years earlier. The basic aim was "supporting the Commonwealth through its own social, music, art and welfare activities". Sir Evelyn continued to edit the journal until the Second World War. His ambition was to create an imperial society of a million members and to circulate the magazine as widely as possible.

We can read, in this edition, about how the magazine changed in style and length over the years. At one stage it reached 100 pages. It was highly personalised under Sir Evelyn's editorship but was adapted substantially by succeeding editors. I am intrigued that one of my former parliamentary colleagues, Tom Iremonger MP, was Editor for many years. Early contributors include G B Shaw, A A Milne, members of the Royal family, former Prime Ministers and notably for me, in 1956, Alan Lennox-Boyd, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, who taught me so much about politics and the Commonwealth.

> "Wrench grasped the opportunity to launch this magazine to become a 'shop window' of the aspirations of the club

Sir Evelyn's farsighted aspiration was to see an imperial federation of autonomous states, free and equal, non-racist and democratic. If he was alive today he would see that modern technology and the opportunity for networking gives an exciting chance to intensify personal communication within and between our 53 countries across the globe. The challenge is now for Overseas to generate increased ROSL membership and become the major Commonwealth-wide journal.

SPREADING THE WORD

Samantha Whitaker explores Sir Evelyn Wrench's talent and vision as editor and journalist, from Overseas to The Spectator



1

Having established his visionary Over-Seas Club in 1910 and undertaken a gruelling world tour to drum up support for it, Sir Evelyn Wrench returned with a determination to start a regular magazine to communicate with the club's new members.

He had recently resigned from his newspaper posts after eight years working for the press baron Lord Northcliffe in various roles, including as Editor of *The Overseas Daily Mail*. This journalistic training proved invaluable, and in December 1915 Wrench published the first edition of *Overseas* with financial backing from an American friend, Alexander Smith Cochran, who he described as the 'fairy godfather' of the club.

By 1922, the magazine was reaching thousands of subscribers around the world, and Wrench started to look for another channel through which to communicate his ideas. He began contributing to *The Spectator*, an intellectual weekly magazine that was then, as it is now, packed with newsbites and thought-provoking, often highly opinionated editorial, as well as literary and cultural reviews. Just a year later, he took over the business side of *The Spectator*, and in 1925 became Editor, buying a controlling interest from John St Loe Strachey, who had been at the helm for an impressive 38 years. The circulation leapt to 21,500 and the magazine was soon seen as one of London's leading weeklies.

Like *Overseas* and *Landmark*, the English-Speaking Union's newsletter, which he also edited, *The Spectator* displayed Wrench's light, readable but also serious editorial style. His articles covered topics including politics at home and overseas, travel writings and general philosophy – much like his lengthy 'Monthly Letter' in *Overseas*.

Ever the enterpriser, he didn't miss the opportunity to cross-promote his publications and an issue of *Overseas* from 1930 states: "*The Spectator* expresses its news and views in a manner as easy and pleasant as that of a clever man at his Club. The aim is to insure readers against missing the true bearing of any event, and it is especially useful to busy men and women who have no time to read the daily press, but who feel that today a knowledge of affairs is essential… There is no paper in the English language which is so widely read."

1. **Sir Evelyn:** Pictured in the 21st anniversary issue of *Overseas* in August 1931.
2. **Promotion:** An advertisement for *The Spectator* in the same edition.
3. **Far-reaching:** Sir Evelyn and Lady Wrench at ROSL's Montreal office in 1930.



2

3

As Editor of *The Spectator,* Wrench campaigned notably for constitutional reform in India and for a solution to the 'German problem' prior to WWII, but one of his most remembered achievements was an appeal to readers to 'adopt' the mining town of Aberdare in South Wales, one of the worst hit by the Great Depression in 1929. Within three months, the magazine had raised more than £12,000 (about £700,000 today), and in gratitude the town presented Wrench with a statuette of an Aberdare miner, which still sits in *The Spectator*'s Westminster office today.

In October 1932, Wilson Harris took over as Editor and, seven years later, Wrench reluctantly gave up the editorship of *Overseas* due to the war. Although he sold his controlling share in *The Spectator* to Ian Gilmour in 1954, he remained a regular contributor and chair of the board of management until his death in 1966. *Samantha Whitaker is Deputy Editor at Sunday and a former Deputy Editor of* Overseas.