

Review of Hillers Gardens Meeting

After far too long apart it was a real pleasure to share our passion for all things Egyptian face-to-face with some old friends. This was thanks to the organisational skills and dedication of **Mark Walker**, former Deputy Chair of SAES, who treated us to two of his signature presentations on the theme of *'Egypt on Film'*.

First he looked at the way in which portrayals of the goddess ISIS have exercised the imagination, sometimes vividly or even outrageously, of cinematographers.



In his second presentation, Mark explored the way in which Egypt was portrayed in the films of Cecil B DeMille, with particular emphasis on the classic *'The Ten Commandments'*, starring Charlton Heston and Yul Brynner.

Mark primed his audience from the start to think about certain questions which generated some lively discussions. Many of us took delight in reliving our first viewing and sharing our recollections of the films Mark highlighted. He pointed out that casting, script and wardrobe in these films were dictated by the Hays Code

The newsletter of The Southampton Ancient Egypt Society

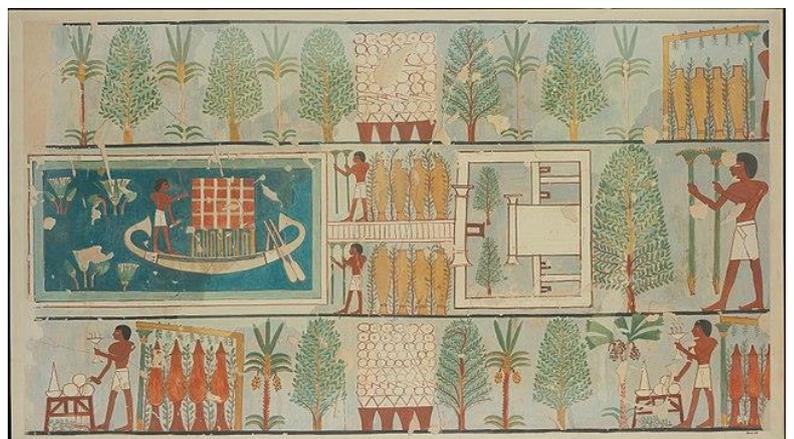
the American code of practice for film-makers in force until the late 1960s, which, amongst other restrictions, 'prohibited profanity, suggestive nudity, graphic or realistic violence, sexual persuasions and rape'.

In our discussions, we clearly recognised that Egyptian realism was secondary to the Biblical themes of most of these films and that Classical authors and Judaeo-Christian beliefs were the directors' main influences and source material.

Mark's last presentation was a short survey of the most significant trees of Egypt, ancient and modern. This was in preparation for a guided tour of Hilliers Gardens with Head Gardener Fran Clifton pointing out some of the trees from Mark's talk.

We have to thank Mark for putting the fascinating programme together and making all the arrangements with the venue. This special event was enjoyed by all participants, especially because it offered us first the chance for an in-person meeting in more than two years.

Hilary Wilson



Funerary garden of Minnakht, facsimile painting MMA NY

In the News

Annette has provided this Facebook link about the new visitor attraction, the King Khufu Centre, on the Giza plateau.

<https://www.facebook.com/168220473208666/posts/pfbid02rmSAMq2h47vHt238pFmwVVF2qkBw2MgKShPLH6dWVbaD92VoWzrHEVdJamTsakBHI/>



You can see reports on the opening of this centre on various news websites such as:

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2022/09/11/egypt-inaugurates-visitor-centre-and-restaurant-on-giza-plateau/>

Summer Quiz Answers

The anagrams all relate to the two anniversaries – 100 years since the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and 200 years since the decipherment of hieroglyphs.

1: Jean-François **CHAMPOLLION** published the first of his work on the decipherment of hieroglyphs in 1822

2: The **ROSETTA STONE**, a bilingual text (Egyptian and Greek) was the key to decipherment.

3: **HIGHCLERE CASTLE** is the stately home of Lord Carnarvon, sponsor of the expedition that discovered Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922.

4: The English physicist, **THOMAS YOUNG**, contributed to the decipherment of hieroglyphs by studying another bilingual inscription on the obelisk at...

THOMAS



5: ...**KINGSTON LACY**, the stately home of William John Bankes who travelled widely in Egypt and collected many antiquities including the obelisk.

6: **HOWARD CARTER**, the Norfolk-born archaeologist who discovered Tutankhamun's tomb, KV62, in the Valley of the Kings.

September Quiz

Following on from the Hilliers meeting, can you give the common names of these Egyptian trees?

- 1:** *Cedrus libani*
- 2:** *Dalbergia melanoxylon*
- 3:** *Ficus sycomorus*
- 4:** *Phoenix dactylifera*
- 5:** *Ziziphus spina-christi*
- 6:** *Tamarix nilotica*

Trees around Nebamun's garden pond, BM



**The following is the text of the
SAES Chair's Report for 2022, as
presented to the AGM on Thursday
15 September.**

Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the Southampton Ancient Egypt Society. It seems almost impossible that another year has passed and we are about to embark on our twenty-fourth season. Since our last AGM, so much has happened in the world, in the last few months and especially the last few days, that *our* difficulties and concerns pale into insignificance. My first task is to thank the committee for their support and their hard work on the Society's behalf, much of which goes on behind the scenes, in keeping the Society going. If we had not been willing to embrace the Zoom technology, we would have gone the same way as other Ancient Egypt groups. By moving to on-line talks during the two years of the Covid pandemic we have survived and, indeed, thrived.

On a personal note, as always, I would like to mention my own particular favourites among the varied programme of talks which we enjoyed over the last year. A highlight has to be the evening talk by Salima Ikram, speaking from Belfast having arrived from Egypt only a couple of hours before. What a professional! I did not really know what to expect of Bernadette Brady's study of the astronomical ceiling at Esna but it was a fascinating and lucid account of the merging of ancient Egyptian and Classical concepts of the calendar and the night sky. Nicky van de Beek's survey of a 5th Dynasty tomb chapel in Leiden, its discovery and interpretation, led to the amazing and poignant story of Herta Mohr, the female scholar responsible for the research. Prevented from completing her Egyptological studies under Nazi occupation of the

Netherlands, she died in Bergen-Belsen. Andrew Shortland's discussion of ancient Egyptian glass and glazes, another take on a topic which we have heard covered before, was absolutely engrossing and presented in a very congenial style. I could mention others but I think you get the message. As you will see from the details available on the website, we have another exciting series of Zoom lectures planned for the coming year, culminating in July in a Study Day, or rather weekend of sessions devoted to the Gebel el-Silsila Project with Maria Nillson and John Ward.

As on each occasion when we changed venues in the past – from the University to Wyvern, from there to Oasis Lordshill – we have inevitably lost members and gained some new ones. The big advantage of online presentations has been the ability to host speakers from much further afield than before. This has given us opportunities to hear from people from all around the world, a trend which will be evident from the programme we have to offer for the coming year. With travel or accommodation expenses to consider, as well as speakers' fees and venue hire, such lecturers would be completely beyond our budget. I would like to take this moment to express my personal appreciation for the work of our Programme Secretary, Anna Welch, who has been very patient and persistent in following up recommendations and tracking down contact details for speakers, then badgering them into a response, negotiating dates and fees, and finally committing them to a booking. All this she has done while in full-time employment, splitting her time between Southampton and Cumbria, and preparing for her daughter's wedding, as well as experiencing her own health problems.

Although we have all missed the personal interaction of our face-to-face meetings, we cannot ignore the fact that first the pandemic and then the recent rapid rises in the cost of living, have changed the way we operate. Venues which were closed for many months have had to reinvent themselves and cater to the more lucrative market of conferences and weddings. Even when we were at the University, with a regular monthly booking agreed at least twelve months in advance, we were quite often shunted to a different room or, on occasions, to a different building on a different campus, at short notice to accommodate a conference or more prestigious group. Schools and colleges are having to think twice about whether they can afford to heat premises at the weekend especially as we move into the winter months. This will surely lead to restrictions on weekend use and availability.

As a Society based in Southampton, we have always drawn our audience from a catchment extending in both directions along the South Coast, from Bournemouth to Portsmouth, inland to Winchester and Salisbury, and beyond. The position of our venue in relation to the distribution of our Membership has always made travel easier for some than for others and we much appreciate the loyalty and dedication of those who regularly gave up virtually half a weekend to attend a two-hour lecture. Zoom lectures have allowed us to welcome guests from throughout the UK and abroad, many of whom have subsequently become Members, and have raised the profile of the SAES.

The average attendance for our Saturday Zoom meetings over the past eleven months has been 42, with audiences predominantly composed of subscribed Members. The average

attendance at our three evening meetings was 44. For the year 2021-22 we had 55 subscribed Members, but we have not forgotten the long-standing Members who have been unable, for a variety of reasons, to access our Zoom programme. They have been kept informed about all our meetings by way of regular e-mail messages and reminders, and issues of our newsletter, *Hotep*, sent out by Emily Hale, who also manages our FaceBook page. Members and guests have direct contact with our Secretary, Annette Winter, who deals with enquiries of all sorts, keeps a record of and confirms receipt of payments, and maintains the Society's database, with some assistance from Nicola Simpson. Unlike me, Emily and Annette have full-time jobs and I am in awe of the way they have both maintained their composure at times of stress. In particular, I must pay tribute to Annette, who is unfortunately not able to be with us tonight but who we will see on Saturday. She has been under the strictest of Covid restrictions for more than two years during which time the workload from her employment has more than doubled. She has had and is still experiencing some very difficult and sad family issues and yet she retains a cheerful outlook. I especially value our lengthy phone-calls in which we set the world to rights or just have a good moan.

A major part of our communication with Members is the website which has been created, overhauled and kept constantly up to date by David Marriott, to whom many thanks. We have been investigating the practicalities of hybrid presentations, live-streaming face-to-face meetings, via Zoom. In the best of all possible worlds this would give us the flexibility of reaching online and in-person audiences at the same time, and hosting

speakers from remote locations. I would like to thank David again for his research and experimentation along these lines and for sharing with us his experiences of hybrid meetings at another of the interest groups with which he is associated. What this has shown us is that hybrid meetings take a lot more organisation than you might think, and that the basic essential of reliable Wi-Fi or, preferably, Internet access at the venue, can by no means be guaranteed. Problems such as time-lag and signal interruption can make audience interaction with the speaker difficult and frustrating. This is why we are following up various ideas for putting on occasional Local meetings, for a face-to-face audience.

There are, inevitably, limitations imposed by this format, limitations which we did not have to consider in the days before Covid. Venue hire-charges together with any extras they might impose, such as insurance cover, added to speakers' fees and expenses, are fixed regardless of the size of the audience. Currently, with the registration and pre-payment system for Zoom meetings, we have a pretty good idea of the size of audience to expect for any talk. Indeed, although a few registrants may fail to join the meeting, we regularly accept late registrations right up to the start of the talk, as long as payment can be guaranteed. But the unpredictability of attendance at face-to-face meetings means that it is highly likely that such events would run at a loss. At present, this is not a problem, because we have built up a good reserve, part of which we believe should now be used to give back something to our loyal Members, but I stress this would be, like the occasional evening meetings, IN ADDITION to the main Zoom programme and priced separately.

Although we have possible Southampton venues in mind for a trial return of face-to-face meetings, we need to hear from Members what format they would like these meetings to take, e.g. afternoon or evening, mid-week or weekend, what topics and at what level they would like to have covered and, particularly, which speakers they would like to hear. This last point is not without its own problems as we have discovered in the past when a speaker has landed us with an unexpected and sometimes substantial bill for accommodation or other expenses. Now, though Anna does a great job in agreeing expenses in advance in writing, increased travel costs in both time and money are making speakers less willing to travel and if they were to make the effort only to find they are talking to an audience of a dozen they will not be willing to visit us again.

Here I must give our thanks to Mark Walker, whose organisation of the Hilliers Gardens event was greatly appreciated by all who attended. It was wonderful to meet again some Members we have not seen in person for years. The topics of Mark's talks, his speciality area being 'Egypt on Film', stimulated lively discussion and the guided tour of the Gardens was an added pleasure. I would love to think that we could do something like this again in the not-too-distant future but I have to be honest in saying that the weekday timing limited the attendance and only the inclusion of non-Member guests, such as my husband, Philip, and several past but not current Members, made this event viable. In fact, of the very group we were hoping to tempt back by offering face-to-face meetings, namely Members who have not engaged with our Zoom programme, only four participated in this event. More might have preferred a weekend, but the venue at Hilliers is not

available on Saturdays, as is the case with many other venues which we have explored, and the size of the room limited attendance to 40. I beg you all to understand that we are very aware of and share your eagerness to resume face-to-face meetings and have been working towards finding a solution.

Financially speaking, the Hilliers event just about broke even, illustrating the uncertainties inherent in planning any event, and this was mainly down to Mark not accepting payment for his talks; initially he even paid for his own attendance, which I can assure you we reimbursed. If we had incurred speaker's fees for such a day, we would have had to raise the price of attendance quite substantially, perhaps to a level which, in today's economic climate, people would not have been prepared to pay. Otherwise, since we could not offer more than the 40 places the room would accommodate, we would have had to run it at a significant loss. It is just this sort of balancing act that we have been discussing for months in our committee meetings. Here, I think is the point to ask our Treasurer, Glenn Worthington, to present the annual financial statement which has been circulated to all Members....(copy attached)

On your behalf I would like to thank Glenn for giving up the time to balance the books and keep track of the ins and outs, when he too has serious family commitments. You will see that, financially speaking, we are very comfortable and I am aware that much of that has come from membership subscriptions and meeting fees paid by the regular attendees at our Zoom meetings, which are considerably cheaper to run than traditional lectures. Last year we made donations to several Egyptological causes as noted by Glenn, and we could do something similar this

year, if the Membership so approve. However, if we are to go ahead with plans for face-to-face meetings, we need to consider how much we are prepared to spend and indeed, how much we can afford to lose. David has reminded us that £500 of our balance is ear-marked for purchase of a mobile phone or similar device for the streaming of Zoom meetings. We have always kept a 'wind-up balance' to allow for the expenses we would incur if, heavens forefend, SAES had to close. Such expenses would include reimbursement of prepaid transport and accommodation costs, venue hire and compensation for speakers.

In view of the low attendance at this meeting, I do not want to put anything to the vote now but I will devise a brief questionnaire for Hotep (attached) to seek the wishes of the Membership in regard to resuming face-to-face meetings.

As I have explained, the committee has been working full-tilt to keep the Society going in very trying circumstances, but if we are to extend our programme by adding extra face-to-face meetings, we really need help in their advertising, organisation and administration. One or two more committee members who are prepared to share the workload would be very welcome. I will not ask for volunteers to make themselves known at this moment but I would ask anyone who might be interested to contact either Annette or myself after the AGM. This report will be published in the next edition of Hotep so that Members who are not able to be with us tonight will also be given the opportunity to respond to this plea.



Your Society
Needs You!

