



# The Egypt Society of Bristol

# NEWS UPDATE

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c/o Department of Archaeology &  
Anthropology,  
University of Bristol  
43 Woodland Road, BRISTOL  
BS8 1UU  
www.EgyptSocietyBristol.org.uk

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## Chairman's Dig

It's amazing how rapidly the summer vanishes in the distance. One day we are basking/sweltering/wilting (depending on your world-view!) in temperatures akin to those of Egypt, torrential rain then follows and we are then left with distinctly autumnal nip in the air! It also means that the new ESB lecture season is nearly upon us, a full programme having been put in place for the new season, with the exception of the June lecture, which should be confirmed soon, *inshallah!*

As well as the ESB's own lectures, there is also each year the University's Amelia Edwards Memorial Lecture. As you may have already seen from the Web site, the date for this has had to be changed. This is for reasons beyond the organisers' control (basically we were gazumped by the Vice-Chancellor!), but luckily we have managed to sort out an alternate date – so please make sure that **Monday 6 November** is kept clear in your diaries.

Work continues on putting together the new City Museum & Art Gallery Egyptian display. Below is the latest dispatch on progress, with information on how the ESB's donation to the project is being used. It is currently planned that the gallery should re-open in the late spring or early summer of 2007.

Bristol is not alone in the South West in being in the process of redisplaying its Egyptian material, and the Chairman is currently involved in cataloguing Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery's collection in preparation for its returning to public view. While not large, it has some interesting pieces, and has a Bristolian connection, with a number of objects coming from the collection made by Thomas Pease in the nineteenth century. Pease lived in Westbury-on-Trym and was a friend of Amelia Edwards. Indeed, amongst the material that came to Plymouth from the Pease Collection was a pair of coffins that had at one stage been in the Bristol Institution, the ancestor of the today's City Museum & Art Gallery. Their history is being researched by the Chairman, who hopes to lecture to the Society on them in due course.

We look forward to seeing you all in October, *inshallah!*

## Memorandum from the Museum

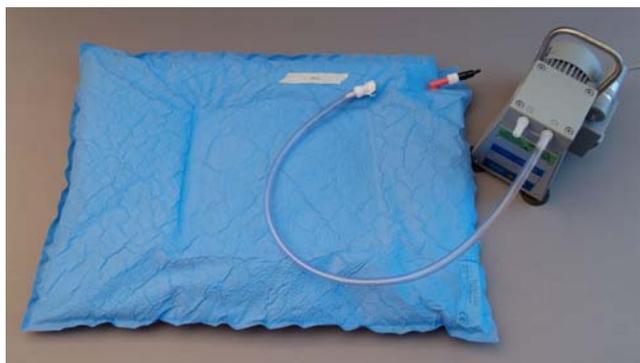
The refurbishment of the permanent Egypt gallery is a primary focus for the Conservation Department of Bristol's Museums & Art Gallery. With advising on the environment of the newly renovated gallery, providing conservation specifications for the specially designed exhibit cases, and preparing over 600 artefacts for display, the conservators are quite immersed in everything Egyptian! All of the specialisms within the Department have a role in this project, from paper to antiquities, to preventive treatment. It has provided a unique opportunity to conserve many of the objects that were on display in the previous gallery, as well as numerous items from the storerooms.

A wide range of artefacts from the Egyptian collections will be going on exhibit in the new gallery, many of which require conservation. After completing the work on Giovanni Belzoni's famous copies of the reliefs in the tomb of Sethy I, paper conservation is now treating several papyrus documents. One of the pieces of fine art that the paintings conservators will be preparing is David Roberts' great *The Temple of Dendera*, currently on display in Gallery VI. The textile conservator is stabilising the wrappings on one of the mummies, as well as working on other textile items such as a child's garment. Numerous stone relief fragments and statuary are being released from old plaster settings and having previous restorations removed, surfaces cleaned and stabilised, and fragments mended. The antiquities conservators are involved in the treatment of materials such as copper alloy suffering from unstable corrosion, cartonnage with lifting surface layers and detached fragments, faience contaminated with soluble salts, cracked and delaminating ivory, and misshapen and brittle plant fibres from objects like baskets and brushes.

Polychrome painted wood, most visible in the form of coffins, is another type of material that requires the attention of antiquities conservation. The plan for the new Egypt gallery includes nine coffins and three coffin pieces (lid or base only) – almost all of those present in the Museum's collections. The coffins are in varying condition, with some requiring surface cleaning and minor stabilisation of surface layers only. Others, however, need structural stabilisation, as well as major surface stabilisation and the removal of past restoration materials that are unstable, inaccurate, and/or obscuring. The funds provided



by the ESB have been dedicated to the conservation of the coffins, enabling the purchase of two important resources and supporting the conservation of one particular coffin element, now in extremely poor condition.



*Figure 1. Vac-Lok™ cushion with form of coffin foot. The cushion was used to provide support during vertical positioning of a coffin lid for mounting. (J. Plitnikas)*

A portion of the donation has also been used to acquire a Vac-Lok™ vacuum cushion. Manufactured by MEDTEC, the cushion is a reusable custom patient positioning system, intended for immobilising patients during radiation therapy or for diagnostic imaging. In conservation, however, it has been an ideal tool for the safe handling of coffins with structural problems and for stabilisation during mounting (Figure 1). Made of reinforced nylon, the cushion contains tiny polystyrene beads that can be shaped to an object. A vacuum is then drawn through the quick-release valve to produce a rigid and perfectly shaped support lasting for up to 60 days.

The remainder of the funds will contribute to the treatment by a private conservator of the late Ptolemaic coffin lid of Peditehuty (now numbered H4308: figure 2). This piece will be displayed in the Death - Corporeal section of the gallery, highlighting the stages of the mummification process as depicted on its central body section. Unfortunately, it is one of the most unstable pieces in the Museum's collection, requiring extensive work beyond the time available to antiquities conservation. H4308 needs structural stabilisation because of several cracks in its wooden form (Figure 3), as well as stabilisation of splitting and fragmenting surface layers. Lastly, many failing and unsightly previous restoration attempts need to be reversed such as discoloured surface coatings, shrunken fills, and nails used to secure loose surface layers.

The support of the ESB for the preservation of the Museum's Egyptian collections is greatly



*Fig. 2. The coffin lid of the Gatekeeper of the Temple of Hathor, Peditehuty, son of Horbebny and Meresmut, probably dating to the second or first century BC; numbered H4308, it came to the museum in 1922 as the gift of J.F. Hollway (D. Emenev)*



Figure 3. H4308: underside, showing cracking. (B. Roberts)

appreciated and will have a lasting effect through continued use of the books and vacuum cushion on numerous other projects and the safe display of a newly stabilised H4308 in the gallery. The Conservation Department would also like to extend a special welcome to Society members to attend 'Putting Egypt on Display', a public conservation event which will focus on the work being done to prepare the Egyptian objects. Please do come to this event (Saturday, November 18 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.), where you can see some of the conservation techniques firsthand and talk to the conservators about their work.

Jill Plitnikas,  
Assistant Conservator (Antiquities)

## Lecture report

By Margaret Curtis

27th June 2006

*British Painters and Egyptian Visions 1850 - 1900*  
Donato Esposito, University of Plymouth

In the late 18th century Napoleon's expedition to Egypt and Nelson's victory at the Battle of the Nile in August 1798, brought Egypt into the public imagination. Following the battle, Egypt fell to the British, the Rosetta Stone was given to George III and people were hungry for views of the land of Egypt. The *Description de l'Égypte* and museum collections placed the artefacts, which had survived the centuries in the public gaze: the past was coming alive again.

The British Museum became a Mecca for those interested in seeing discoveries such as the Rosetta Stone. The more adventurous even journeyed to Egypt to see the country for themselves.

Egypt and the life of its people became the subject of many paintings. Artists painted idealised

pictures of subjects and scenes from 'daily life', although many of the painters had never set foot in Egypt. They created their works using items they had seen in places such as the British Museum and publications such as Sir Gardiner Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egypt*. Painters copied exactly the illustrations in books such as this, even down to the errors. For instance, in one publication a harp is shown upside down, and it appears upside down in the resulting painting.

One of the most well known artists of this genre is Lawrence Alma-Tadema. His most famous work is 'Death of the First Born' which depicts the 10th plague of Egypt. The artist's son had died not long before he did the work, so this may have been the reason he chose this particular subject. The painting can now be seen in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

Alma-Tadema's interest in Egyptian themes was also reflected in his home in St Johns Wood, which was decorated using Egyptian themes. To pay for these decorations the artist had to paint larger canvasses such as 'The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra', a very voluptuous and romanticized version of what their meeting may have been like. If anyone is interested, the house is currently for sale at around £35M!

Many other artists produced work showing scenes from 'daily life', historic events, or scenes of the countryside. They include Albert Moore, George Pryce Boyce, William Holman Hunt, Edward John Pointer and George Frederick Watts, who honeymooned in Egypt.

Many of their paintings can still be seen in various galleries and museums around the world and they are worth seeking out. I cannot describe here the paintings, which Donato showed in his slides, but imagine they must have contributed to the Egypt depicted in many Hollywood films of the 50s and 60s. More information on the artists and their work can be found on the Internet.

# Egypt Society of Bristol Programme 2006/7

**Tues 17 October 2006:** Lecture, *Monarchs and Miners: What went on in Sinai?*  
Tom Hardwick, Bolton Museum. **NOTE: in Lecture Room 2 (where we normally have the nibbles!)**

**Monday 6 November:** University of Bristol Amelia Edwards Memorial Lecture (*entry free*)  
*The Qasr Ibrim Taharqa Wall-Painting Rescue Project*  
David Singleton, Bristol's City Art Gallery & Museum  
**Reception Room, Will's Memorial Building, Queen's Road (Clifton Triangle), 1715 hrs.**  
*NB. This is a University event, not an ESB one. However, all are welcome! **NOTE NEW DATE***

**Tues 14 November 2006:** Lecture, *Egypt in the third dimension: Stereophotography in Egyptology and Archaeology* (this lecture will be in 3D!)  
Dr Paul Nicholson, Archaeology Section, University of Cardiff

**Tues 12 December 2006:** Lecture, *Art and the Myth of Kingship in Ancient Egypt*  
George Hart, lately of The British Museum

**Tues 16 January 2007:** Lecture, *John Garstang and the Liverpool Institute of Archaeology*  
Pat Winker, School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, University of Liverpool

**Tues 13 February 2007:**

- Annual General Meeting (at 1830)
- Lecture: *The Tomb of Osiris at Abydos*  
Dr Aidan Dodson, Chairman ESB.
- Winter Party (at 1945)

ESB lectures are usually held in Lecture Room 1, Department of Archaeology, 43 Woodland Road, Clifton, at 1845. Doors open at 1815. Street parking available in the vicinity. Disabled access is available.

**Tues 6 March 2007:** Lecture, *The Wall-Paintings from the Tomb of Nebamun at Thebes*  
Dr Richard Parkinson, Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan, The British Museum

**18 March – 2 April 2007:** Bristol Magpies tour of Egypt (*approx £1,700*)  
*Introductory visit to Egypt, including Saqqara, Giza, Islamic Cairo, Faiyum, Luxor, Western Thebes, Nile Cruise.*  
To be escorted by Aidan Dodson, Chairman ESB  
*NB. This is an event organised by the Bristol Magpies, the Museum friends' organisation, not the ESB. Contact: Mary Bailey, 22 Carnarvon Road, BS6 7DT, tel. 0117-942 1944.*

**Tues 8 May 2007:** Lecture, *The Columns of Ancient Egypt*  
Peter Phillips

**June 2007: to be confirmed**

**Tues 17 July 2007:**

- Lecture, *Up the Nile in Style: Travel in Egypt in the Early 20th Century*  
David Moyer, *Kmt Magazine*, New York, USA
- Summer Party (at 1945)

## RAFFLE TIME!

There will be a very special raffle prize this Autumn. Our member Penny Walters (who runs a stall of Egyptian goods at our parties) has very generously donated a week at her flat in Luxor – you would have to pay for your own flight(s), but you would be free from the tyranny of the package tour, and have the opportunity to 'live' in Egypt, rather than simply lodge there.

Tickets will be on sale at the October and November lectures, with the winning ticket to be drawn at the December meeting, to give the maximum number of people a chance of winning.

If you want to know more about the flat please drop Penny a line at [penny\\_walters@talk21.com](mailto:penny_walters@talk21.com).