



The Egypt Society of Bristol

NEWS UPDATE

Issue 28

November 2012

Chairman's Dig

It is over a year now since the previous newsletter – and it is entirely the my fault (as always!). But it does mean that this issue is something of a bumper one, with an account of a visit to Figeac, the birthplace of the brothers Champollion, Jean-François – the decipherer of hieroglyphs – and Jacques Joseph who ensured that his sibling's life-work was published after his premature death. There is also a piece on the recent rediscovery of the grave of Sarah Belzoni, the widow of the great Giovanni, and an update on how their surviving papers made their way to Bristol.

Since the last Newsletter, the Treasurer and I have been back to Egypt a couple of times and seen the state of tourism, post-revolution. It is still pretty grim, but there do seem to be green shoots of recovery, with some large groups at Karnak temple and a reasonable showing in the Valley of the Kings. On the other hand, the places that do not feature on the itineraries of the big tour groups are still very empty – we had the whole Valley of the Queens to ourselves for quite some time, and there was only one small group there when we left. We will continue to keep you all informed!



A visit to Figeac

Figeac is a delightful medieval town in the Lot Department in South West France. It lies on the pilgrimage route to Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle, not only attracting pilgrims but also Egyptologists, being the birthplace of Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832).

He was an extraordinary linguist being fluent in twelve languages ancient and modern, plus his native French. He published his first translation of the Rosetta Stone in 1822, so opening up the whole ancient Egyptian world of hieroglyphs. In Figeac, in 1991, an enormous open-air reproduction of the Stone was unveiled in a small square, surrounded by medieval buildings. This replica (14m x 7m!) was created by the American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth in black granite from Zimbabwe. Set in the pavement, the Greek, demotic and hieroglyphic characters are clearly delineated,

proving a magnet for both photographers and the children who play on it.



Museum of 'The Scripts of the World'

Just around the corner, in the Place de Champollion, the main square in Figeac, is the Museum of 'The Scripts of the World'. This stunning building has a 13th century facade with a very modern interior. The front displays an immense, pierced copper screen showing a 1,000 characters from ideograms and scripts from the ancient and modern world. It glows in the sunlight. From the top floor balcony, there are lovely views down the narrow medieval streets (wide enough to take a car if feeling brave!) and across the square, which is always bustling with visitors enjoying the open air cafés.

games and exhibits for children, which in no way detract from the overall ambience.

The remaining exhibitions reveal other ancient scripts, their development and the cultures involved. The museum attracts not only visitors to its galleries but also to attend evening concerts which are also staged inside.

Neil and I stayed in the Hotel Champollion, right opposite the museum. Like the museum, it has a 13th century facade with a very modern interior. Although only 2-star, it offers comfortable accommodation with very welcoming staff, in a perfect central position.

Dee Marshall



Champollion's correlation of the Rosetta Stone's hieroglyphic text with the demotic

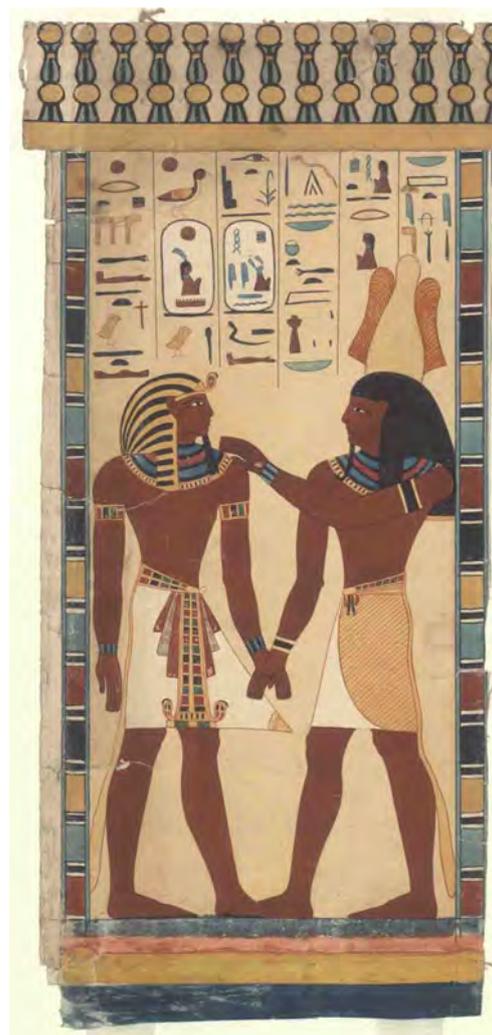
Sarah Belzoni: her grave and her legacy

As many ESB members are aware, amongst the treasures of the City Museum & Art Gallery are watercolours that once formed parts of models of the tomb of Sethy I that were exhibited in London and Paris by its discoverer, Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1823), together with notebooks belonging to him and his wife, the apparently Bristol-born Sarah (*née* Parker-Brown, 1783-1870).



Champollion's transcription of the cartouche 'Cleopatra'.

Inside the museum are four floors displaying seven exhibitions, of which Champollion and his work, is without doubt the main attraction. Here are displayed his portrait, his work-books and various quotations from him, my favourite one being "I slept two or three times a week on the Rosetta inscription, I gained nothing except headaches and two or three words." Also on display are mummies, statuettes and various other artefacts. Everything is displayed very clearly and stylishly with some interactive



Copy of a column in the tomb of Sethy I, from one of the exhibited models of the tomb Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery H4460A

After Giovanni's early death – in Benin in West Africa, en route to Timbuktu – Sarah had continued to try to exhibit and publish his finds in London and Paris, but 'retired' to Brussels in 1833, where she lived for over 30 years. In the mid-1860s she settled in Jersey, dying in Bellozanne Road, St Helier, at the age of 87 on the 12th January 1870.



The unveiling of Sarah Belzoni's restored grave by the Constable of St Helier, 14 November 2012

The location of her grave was believed lost until it was 'rediscovered' in 2011 by the team effort of Dr John J. Taylor, Vic Geary and Anna Baghiani. As the inscription and stone were badly weathered (see *Ancient Egypt* 12/3 [2011/12], 16), an appeal was issued to raise funds for its restoration. Thanks to the generosity of local resident Mr Philip Hewat-Jaboor, together with Mark Reynolds of Jersey Monumental Co, the gravestone has now been beautifully restored and was unveiled by the Constable of St Helier, Simon Crowcroft on 14 November 2012, in the Mont à l'Abbé cemetery, St Helier, in the presence of the Chairman and Treasurer.

According to a will she made a few days before her death, Sarah left all her possessions to her unmarried god-daughter Selina Belzoni Tucker, at that time resident in Cheltenham. Baptised at Portsea, Hampshire, Selina had previously worked as a governess to members of the noble Irish Tighe family, in Brussels and then at 3 Upper Belgrave Street, London (where the family is listed in the 1851 census). Ten years later Selina was living with her sister Sarah Ann, who had also been a governess – to the family of Gibbs Antrobus MP at Eaton Hall in Cheshire in 1851. In 1861 the sisters were resident at Bloomfield Place, Litchurch,

Derbyshire; by 1871 they were at 2 Belleview Crescent, Clifton, moving by 1881 to 11 Hanover Street in Bath.



Sarah Belzoni's restored gravestones; the smaller one seems originally to have been the footstone

Sarah Ann later moved to 2 St Anne's Place, Tiverton Road, Exeter, but at the time of her death aged 69, on 13 December 1889, she was living with Selina at 71 Orchard Street, Weston-super-Mare, above what is now an Indian restaurant. Selina also died there, aged 72, on 27 April 1893. The sisters are buried in Milton Road Cemetery, Weston-super-Mare, in separate unmarked graves, but with a common monument close to Sarah Ann's grave.

Selina Belzoni Tucker's heir was her cousin Sarah Ann Wilson (née Tucker, 1844-1921), who had married Charles Wilson (1842-1917), a storekeeper at King Edward's School, St George's Road, London, on 10 July 1866 at Holy Trinity Church, Newington, London. The Wilsons retired before 1911 to 56 Upper Walthamstow Road, as Pensioners of Bethlem Hospital and King Edward's School. Sarah Ann Wilson died at 3 Upper Walthamstow Road on 6 March 1921.

It was their son, Charles Edward Wilson, a Baptist minister born in 1872 who, presumably acting as his mother's agent, gave what remained of Giovanni and Sarah Belzoni's Egyptian material to Bristol City Museum in 1900.

Aidan Dodson & Anna Baghiani



Egypt Society of Bristol Programme

December 2012 – June 2013

All ESB lectures are held in Lecture Room 1, Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, 43 Woodland Road, Clifton, at 1845. Entry for members is free, £2.00 for non-members; 'wine and nibbles' afterwards are available for a nominal fee of £1.00.

Tue 11 December 2012. Lecture: *The Rev. William MacGregor and his Egyptian Collection.*
Bev Rodgers, Swansea University.

Tue 22 January 2013.
Annual General Meeting (at 1830)
Lecture: *Howard Carter and the Valley of the Kings.*
Aidan Dodson, University of Bristol.

Tue 12 March 2013. Lecture: *Purity and Order in an Ancient Egyptian Household.*
Lucia Gahlin, Friends of the Petrie Museum.

Tue 7 May. *Tomb Security in Ancient Egypt - from the Predynastic to the Pyramid Age.*
Reg Clark, Swansea University.

Tue 25 June 2013. Lecture: *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Henry Rhind*
Claire Gilmour, Egyptology Scotland. **CHANGE OF DATE!**