



# INSCRIPTIONS

*The Newsletter of the Friends of the Egypt Centre, Swansea*

## Issue 14

July 2003

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**Note: I have been asked by the Friends Committee to clarify to all Friends members that the Nile Cycle Charity Challenge is completely separate from the Friends of the Egypt Centre.**

The Nile Cycle Charity Challenge and all the events held raising funds for this challenge are organised jointly by the Egypt Centre staff and Taliesin staff. Such events include the Egyptology conference held in May, Sunday matinee's shown in the Taliesin theatre, Fun-day, Friday cake sales, auctions, Tony Ridler Garden opening, etc. All funds raised are banked in a separate account.

... continued overleaf

## *Nile Bike Ride – a Thank You*

*Friday May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2003*

*Dear Friend*

*On behalf of The Egypt Centre, Taliesin and Business Services staff at the University of Wales Swansea, who are the 'Nile Cycle Challengers', we would like to thank you for the donation you gave us for use at our recent 'Fun-Day', Saturday May 3<sup>rd</sup>. The day was a great success and we raised £1,766.50. The money will be put towards our Nile Cycle Challenge; the total now stands at £11,500. We now look forward to next year's event and your continued support.*

*The 'Nile Cycle Challengers' are raising funds for two charities; The Sunshine Project International and the Egypt Centre's innovative outreach workshops for disadvantaged children in Swansea.*

*The Egypt Centre workshops for disadvantaged children living in Swansea, help by offering 15 children, each month, a place on the 'young Egyptologist' 2-day fun-packed course. Schools with a high number of children who are disadvantaged socially or economically are targeted. The museum provides transport and a packed lunch as well as a folder of completed work and art and craft materials. The culmination of the course is the award ceremony to which teachers, family and friends of the children are invited to see the children being presented with a certificate of their achievement. The course aims to motivate children to foster a love of learning, to increase self-esteem and confidence through a greater sense of achievement, as well as developing literacy and numeracy skills.*

*The Sunshine Project International is based in Luxor, Egypt. The aim of the charity is to care for abandoned and needy children in Egypt and its promise is to leave no child in need behind. Once a child, usually a baby under a day old, has been admitted into Sunshine they have a home for life. On average a new baby arrives every month and with numbers swelling it is imperative that a new residence for the children is built. Sunshine is wholly reliant on the generosity and compassion of tourists, chiefly British ones. Our aim is to aid the charity build a new bigger and better home and to help towards running costs. Only last Monday a new baby girl, Manil, was delivered to the home making the number of children 45.*

*Once again thank you for your support*

*Wendy Goodridge*

*Stuart Williams*



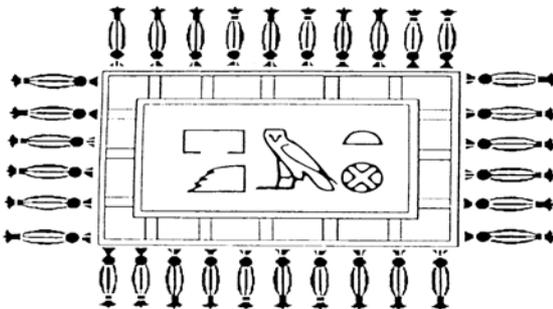


... Nile Bike Ride continued

So far we have raised over £11,000 and the Egypt Centre Saturday club for disadvantaged children living in Swansea and the Sunshine home in Luxor will benefit. The funding has also enabled us to employ four members of staff on a Saturday to help run the clubs so that is great news in itself for four of our wonderful volunteers!

A big thank-you to all Friends members who have supported us and come along to any of the events. I hope the situation is now clear to all Friends members. If you do want any more information please contact either myself or Stuart at the Egypt Centre or Sybil Crouch at the Taliesin.

*by Wendy Goodridge*



## Mid Term Test

Sitting around in the quiet classroom,  
Writing as fast as we can;  
It's obvious that something is going on,  
Is it the mid-term exam?

Our hopes are on high with all we've absorbed,  
Our nerves are all of a fizz;  
Will it ask what we've learnt, or what we've ignored?  
It's all a bit hit and miss.

Our hands have written us out of our heads,  
They are flying away so fast,  
Our thoughts lag behind, our fears are on hold,  
How quickly the time has gone past.

Too much to be said, too little remembered,  
Our lack is not to our credit;  
However do they think we should have absorbed  
Everything as Stuart has said it!

Now it is over we again can draw breath,  
Although our hearts are still pumping.  
It's not very nice to look forward to marks,  
But our still tongues now are jumping.

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*by Susan Godding*

## Going Home

Holidays come and holidays go, but my visit to Egypt was an experience that will stay with me forever.

Booked as a holiday, our trip was to be transformed into a bitter-sweet labour of love following the sudden death of my partner Phill's beloved mum, Chris. Chris was no ordinary mum - she was, in fact, extraordinary. I can honestly say that of her three daughters-in-law, I felt honoured that I knew her best.

Our friendship was only too brief. I met Chris just two years before she died but during that time I listened with amazed interest at her sharing her past life in Egypt. Chris had lived as a highborn lady during the time of Ramses II. Her recollections were clear and precise. The other daughters-in-law thought she was 'batty'. I feel so sorry that they never took the time to listen.

As I said previously, Phill and I had booked the holiday for the two of us in the April, to spend two weeks visiting Cairo and Luxor and a week's cruising on the Nile. Little did we know at the time that Chris was coming with us.

Chris died suddenly in March and, following her wish to be cremated, she had not stated where she wished her ashes to be interred - so we took her home.

Home to Cairo - to the pyramids at Giza where the sun scorched our very souls as Phill scattered his dear mum's ashes at the foot of the Great Pyramid.

The moment will stay etched in my memory forever, seeing him standing alone, executing the very last thing he could do for her, while I distracted a camel owner who persisted in pursuing us wherever we went.

This act was done with thought and reverence as we knew it was what Chris would have wanted. Then came the question - "What to do with the casket?" We decided that Phill would write her one last message and, after filling the casket with water, Phill cast it into the Nile.

Chris had gone home.

She had not had an easy life but we felt that she had returned to the homeland that had afforded her the lifestyle that she so richly deserved - that of a lady of the highest order.

If you are ever lucky enough to visit Egypt - think of Chris. Wherever you are she will be. The winds will have transported her to every corner of her sacred land and she will be at one with Egypt forever.

*by Jo Roberts*





## Editorial

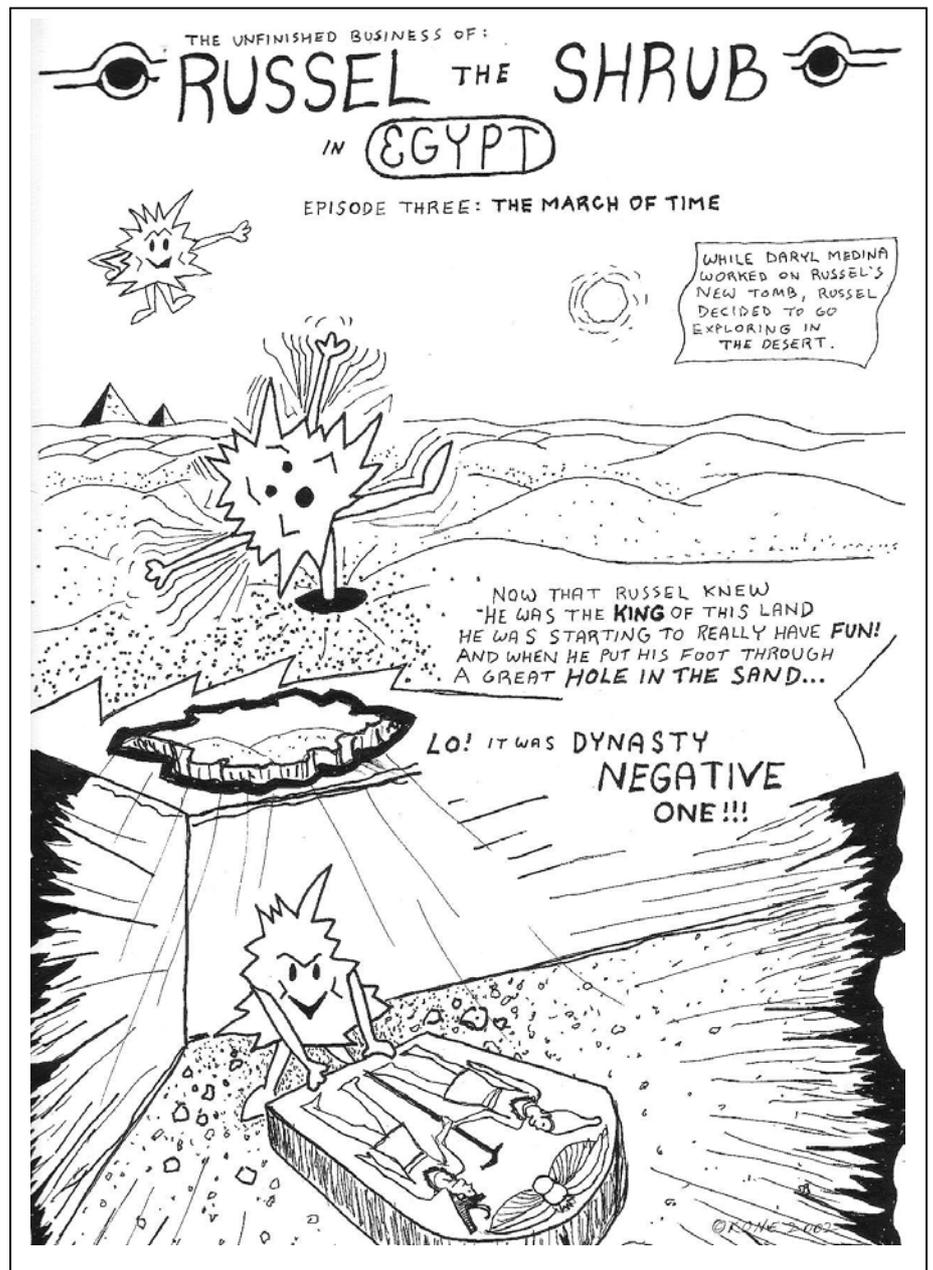
Welcome back to the 14th issue of *Inscriptions*. It is good to see, in this issue, a response to one of the articles in the previous issue. Of course, the views expressed in each article are those of the individual contributor, not those of the Egypt Centre or of the Editor.

A big "thank you" to all those stalwart volunteers who took part in the Nile Bike Ride. As you will see from this issue, they were successful in generating sponsorship and raising funds for the good causes. Also, a big "thank you" to all those who so generously sponsored our "team of athletes".

See below for a note for your diary about the forthcoming A.G.M. Please make every effort to attend. The accompanying lecture sounds most intriguing!

Contributions to the next issue of *Inscriptions* will be gratefully received and should be sent to the Egypt Centre, marked for the attention of Mike Mac Donagh.

*by Mike Mac Donagh*



## Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting

of the Friends of The Egypt Centre will take place on

24 September 2003 at 6.00 p.m.

in the Esso Lecture Hall.

The AGM will be followed by a lecture by Dr Daniel Ogden entitled:

**"In Search of the Sorcerer's Apprentice: Greek and Egyptian Magic".**





## *Palmyra – the city in the desert*

**“- its slender creamy beauty rising up fantastically in the middle of hot sand. It is lovely and fantastic and unbelievable, with all the theatrical implausibility of a dream.”**

1946 – Agatha Christie, “Come, tell me how you live”

Another one of my “day trips”! This time, less than three hours drive north-east of Damascus, I arrived in Palmyra, also known by its more ancient name of Tadmor, once an important part of the Roman Empire, on the main caravan route between the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. Most visitors are astonished to see the ruins of such a grand city in the isolation of the desert. Its appeal is enhanced by the almost total absence of modern buildings in view. An Arab fortress sits on a hillside to the west, a large palm oasis hides behind the eastern fringes of the ruins, north is a backdrop of hills and to the south the desert shimmers into infinity. The city covers a large area with recognisable remains of colonnaded streets, shops, baths, civic buildings, theatres, temples, and a processional way leading to its main tourist attraction of today, the Temple of Bel.

Under Roman rule Palmyra retained semi-independence and the city was provided with funding and skills to turn its mud-brick civic and religious buildings into stone. The Temple of Bel is one of the largest temple complexes I have seen. It dominates the city and was dedicated in 32 C.E. to the Babylonian god Bel. The sanctuary measures roughly 200m square, with the temple itself at the centre. Even today the remains of its huge Corinthian capitols and delicate and splendid carvings show how magnificent they once were.

The sanctuary stands on an artificial mound and excavations have found potsherds at a depth of

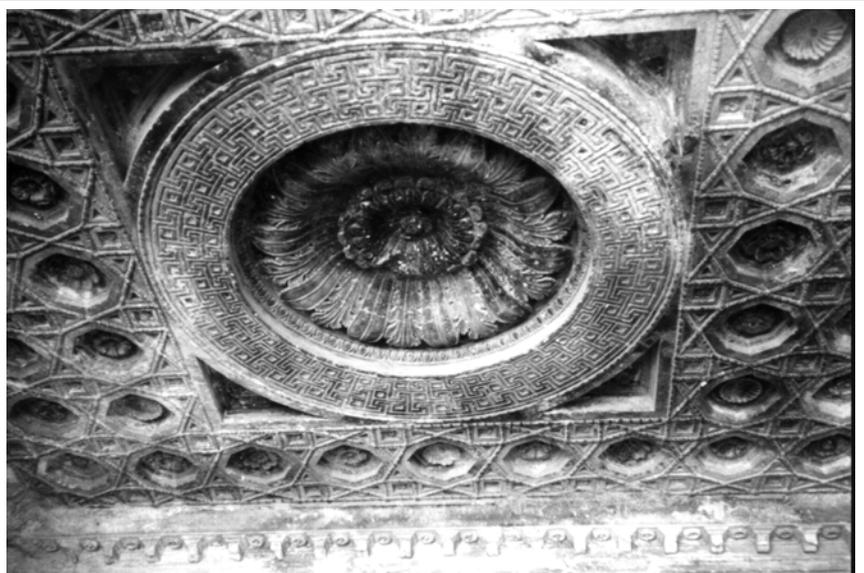


*Palmyra – The Temple of Bel*

6m dating back to 2000 B.C. with Assyrian inscriptions showing this was probably the original site of the settlement, but today’s temple was probably built on the site of an earlier shrine. Within are chambers to the north and south, remarkable for their carved monolithic ceilings, the south side having a huge acanthus at its centre, which has been much copied in stucco on the ceilings of some of England’s greatest country houses.

Along the colonnaded streets are bases where once stood fine statues, but only inscriptions remain. One of

the most interesting is that to Zenobia, “most pious and illustrious queen”. For a brief period in history she touched Palmyra with romance, then brought about its destruction. Taking advantage of Rome’s troubles in Germany, she declared herself empress after her husband’s murder in 267 A.D. (rumour has it, by Zenobia herself). She laid claim to the eastern half of the Roman Empire and led her armies to the Nile and into Anatolia, but in 272 the Emperor Aurelian captured Palmyra; Zenobia was captured and he led her back to Rome, allegedly in chains of gold. She is said to have



*Acanthus ceiling rose at Palmyra*





ended her days in a villa at Tivoli. Palmyra rose up but was sacked again and the inhabitants massacred. As a trading centre it never recovered; slowly the sands crept in and Palmyra was forgotten by the outside world.

Looking at its ruins, once can imagine its long lost grandeur and splendour. Only the Zenobia Hotel where Agatha Christie and her archaeologist husband stayed in the 1930s remains within the ruins, with Corinthian capitols serving as tables on the terrace overlooking these wonderful ruins. I wish I could have stayed longer, perhaps when things settle in this part of the world you will consider going. I hope you do – it's well worth it!

*by Merlys Gavin*



*The Theatre at Palmyra*

## Reader's comments

I read Claire Edwards' article on the possible connection between Egyptian and Mayan cultures with interest. The idea that, just because pyramids are found in Central America, ancient Egyptians must have been there is surely missing the point of what pyramids represent.

The pyramids of Egypt and the Americas were built for the same reason that European mediaeval builders put spires on churches. It was an attempt to bridge the gap between the sky and earth. The gods dwelt in the sky and humanity desired to connect with them. The belief was that if a building was tall enough it would be possible to pierce the heavens and reach the gods directly.

Straight-sided buildings cannot be built particularly high before they become unstable and collapse. Much higher buildings can be achieved if they taper from a broad base - a pyramid or spire. The height buildings constructed in this way can reach is considerably greater than ones with walls perpendicular to the ground. Once that principle of engineering is known it is hardly surprising that the same basic shape will appear in many different and diverse cultures.

Furthermore, the pyramids of Egypt were put to a vastly different use to the American ones. In Egypt pyramids housed the dead.

They were hallowed monuments - to be viewed with awe perhaps, but certainly not to be used in any way once the interment had taken place. Indeed, after the early step pyramids, later ones were clad in facing stones so they were smooth sided and couldn't be climbed upon.

American pyramids, on the other hand, were not tombs - they were used in religious ceremonies (*though some, e.g. that of Pocal, were also tombs – Ed*). The step sides were stairways to the top where priests carried out (often gruesome and blood-letting) ceremonies and rites. They were part of everyday life for the American cultures, whereas the Egyptian pyramids were apart from life - they even stand separated in space from the everyday lives of the people.

With regard to Claire's Mexican guide using the words "stelae" and "hieroglyphs", these are modern words we chose to use to describe certain objects and cannot therefore be interpreted to prove any connection between the civilisations. As for the stelae being covered in hieroglyphs depicting the founder of the city and his defeat of his enemies just like the Egyptian ones, I am afraid this only demonstrates that very early on in his evolution man developed a taste for self-aggrandisement, as well as understanding the value of propaganda!

*by Veronyca Bates Hughes*

## Egyptian Wrap

*With thanks to John H. Taylor*

**Wrapped**  
 mummies were wrapped,  
 wrapping with shrouds,  
 for waiting crowds,  
 that's not the line;  
 gods divine,  
 they shine, shine like gold,  
 gold for soul, immortal whole;  
 that's divine, stones enshrine,  
 kings can dine; surrogate image,  
 is that sage? mortal wage  
 for eternal life, life without strife;  
 don't use the knife, eyes & mouth open  
 make the potion, magic and potion,  
 spiritual notion, could cross an ocean,  
 escape emotion, embalming lotion;  
 priestly solution; mummiform,  
 caused no storm, differing forms,  
 wrapping  
 wrapped.

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*(After the Egyptology Conference at the Taliesin Theatre, Swansea.)*

*by Susan Godding*

