

INSCRIPTIONS

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Egypt Centre, Swansea

Issue 18

December 2004

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Swansea's Egypt Centre welcomes Egypt experts

On Friday and Saturday, 19th and 20th November, Swansea's Egypt Centre hosted a major conference with delegates including some of Britain's top Egyptologists. The conference was supported by the University of Wales Institute of Classics and Ancient History, represented by Anton Powell.

Called 'Museums and the Making of Egyptology,' the conference highlighted the importance of museums in Egyptology. All the speakers presented interesting papers, but to mention a couple, Richard Parkinson from the British Museum talked about the problems of displaying of hieroglyphic texts; Abeer Helmi, who has helped conserve the mummies in Cairo's famous museum, explained how such work influences popular belief, as shown in such films as 'The Mummy' and why she believed museums should display mummies. Other delegates included Susan Allen from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Dr Stephen Quirke and Sally MacDonald both from the Petrie Museum of Egyptian archaeology in London. The conference was chaired by Paul Nicholson from Cardiff.

The conference aimed to highlight the role of museums in the growth of the study of ancient Egypt. While some dismiss them as simply a dumping ground for objects, museums are the place where many people first learn about mummies and pharaohs, the gods of the ancient world, and the mystery and exoticism of the past. At the Egypt Centre, we hope that some of the children who come to us and are excited by the study of the past will go on to become experts in Egyptology. We also hope to bring together all groups with an interest in things Egyptological.

Clearly, Swansea's Egypt Centre thinks it has an important part to play in this. If you want to judge for yourself, remember, we are open Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4pm. Admission is free.



What do YOU think about mummies? Read Carolyn's article on Page 2!



Mummies and museums

Prompted by some lively debate at Egypt Centre's recent conference, I thought I'd do a short, personal piece on why Egypt Centre hasn't put its human remains, on display, or at least the gruesome ones. Perhaps readers could write in with their own views.

Egypt Centre has one or two mummified human remains, a baby. A leg, arm, head etc. When setting up the display, Wendy and I thought long and hard about whether these should go on display. In the end it really boiled down to my deciding that somehow it felt 'wrong'. In my opinion (Wendy might have different views), I felt that we should respect the dead and that if they were my relatives, I wouldn't like people coming in to say how disgusting they look. I have noticed that we have sometimes had requests in the past to see gruesome remains simply because they are gruesome.

We do, however, have a cartonnage containing the remains of a baby on display. But it doesn't look 'yuck'. Additionally, in the Centre we try to remind people that the objects on display belonged to real people like you and me, and we invite visitors to make the Voice Offering (though perhaps this part of the exhibition should be more prominent). We also allow anyone who wants to view the remains to see them, so long as they make an appointment.

Now, I am not saying I am right. Some museums say human remains should go on display to remind people about death. All too often these days, death is sanitised, kept away from us. Some say that we shouldn't even put objects belonging to dead people on display as this is not what they would have wanted. Some adults object to Egypt Centre's 'dummy mummy' as they find it disturbing or disrespectful. I think even we might get a few more visitors if we put gory remains out. And, as Abeer Helmi eloquently explained at the conference, mummies are very much a part of Egyptology and teach people about the past and also the present. At the exhibition by Dominic Montserrat, 'Digging for Dreams' human remains were put on display behind a curtain and visitors could choose for themselves whether to view them. This seems like a good idea though I still have the sneaking fear that excited children or adults will only want a 'thrill' at seeing a decayed piece of human flesh.

And, why don't we send them all back to Egypt...perhaps that's a discussion for another day.

Why not write in with your views.

Happy Christmas,

by Carolyn Graves-Brown

Programme of Events 2004 - 2005

Wednesday 8th December 2004
7.00 Esso Theatre

Bernice Cardy - Swansea
The History & Conservation of Swansea Museum's Mummy: Hor.

Wednesday 19th January 2005
7.00 Esso Theatre

Nigel Pollard - Swansea
Excavating Egypt's Roman Past: Karanis & Koptos

Wednesday 23rd February 2005
7.00 Esso Theatre

Peter Robinson - Manchester
Crossing the night; journeys through the Afterlife

Wednesday 23rd March 2005
7.00 Callaghan Theatre

Howard Ingham - Swansea
Racism in Archaeology/Egyptology

Wednesday 6th April 2005
7.00 Callaghan Theatre

Rosalind Janssen - London
Fashion in Ancient Egypt

Wednesday 11th May 2005
7.00 Esso Theatre

Double Bill: **Bob Partridge & Peter Philips** - Manchester
Royal Mummies & The columns of Ancient Egypt

Wednesday 15th June 2005
7.00 Esso Theatre

Carolyn Graves-Brown - Swansea
Egyptian Priestess Reborn: Scenes from a 21st Dynasty coffin





Editorial

Welcome to the eighteenth issue of *Inscriptions*. The editor and his wife wish to thank the committee and members for their generous presentation at the AGM, which was much enjoyed!

On behalf of all the Friends, we would like to thank Karen O'Flanagan, our outgoing chair, for her sterling work over the past year, and to welcome our new chair, Claire Edwards (see below).

Production of *Inscriptions* is running into difficulty due to lack of contributions from members, so please get your thinking caps on and let us have some articles, which don't necessarily have to be of an Egyptological flavour. Contributions (which should be original, not copied from other published works) should be sent to the Egypt Centre, marked for the attention of Mike Mac Donagh.

The Friends and Committee note with regret the death of Dominic Monserrat who made many valuable contributions to Egyptology.

Finally, the Editor wishes all Egypt Centre staff and Friends a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Mike Mac Donagh

Mummy – the Inside Story

If anyone finds themselves in London over the next few months, then I can highly recommend a trip to the British Museum. I know that for many of us, that would take very little encouraging. There is however even more reason to indulge ourselves, in the form of a new exhibition called ***Mummy: the inside story***.

Recently aired on the television, this exhibition combines the age old curiosity of mummy unwrapping with the unobtrusive technology of CT scanning. This has allowed the 3000-year old mummy of a priest called Nesperennub to be investigated and thoroughly examined, without the destruction of the cartonnage coffin or the body itself. The results of this remarkable investigation have been made available to museum visitors via a 3D movie which lasts around twenty minutes. This virtual reality film is narrated by Sir Ian McKellan, and with the aid of some very fashionable 3D glasses, the viewer can travel through the coffin and the body, exploring along the way the process that led to the priest's embalming. Interspersed throughout the film are reconstructions of the life of the priest and his mummification. The film is incredibly sophisticated in its presentation and the 3D slant lends a depth of experience to the viewer that encourages you to try and reach out to touch the images floating before you.

On leaving the auditorium, visitors are treated to a viewing of the actual mummy cartonnage itself, together with an impressive display which provides further information about what the viewer had just seen. A well stocked and complementary gift shop completes the exhibition. The beauty of the whole experience is the feeling that you have been party to an Egyptology of the future, a future where our unending quest for knowledge of this fascinating culture is not compromising the precious artefacts bequeathed to us from the past.

If you are fortunate to visit however, be warned—book early! The exhibition was extremely busy when I went. Tickets can be obtained in advance from the reception desk, and are £6 per ticket or £3 for a concession. A family ticket is £15 and children under 5's go free.

Visit www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/education/mummy for more details.

by Beverley Rogers

Introducing Claire Edwards

The new chair of the Friends of the Egypt Centre, Claire Edwards, is a retired teacher who she began her working life as a librarian in Swansea University library. She married a graduate of the university and spent the next twenty years travelling the world, following her husband's career as an RAF officer. During this time she lived in Germany, Northern Ireland, Malta and Cyprus and several parts of the UK. Living in the Mediterranean allowed her to visit many Greek and Roman sites, and this interest remained her first love until she encountered the Egyptians, when she became a volunteer at the Egypt Centre some 30years later.

Now, the Egyptians follow her, as everywhere she goes on holiday the Egyptians appear in some shape or form! Her latest encounter with Egyptians occurred in British

Columbia, an area where one would surely not expect to meet them.

She is hoping to increase the membership of the Friends during her tenure of office and asks all members to try to introduce at least one new member. Those of you who were at the last meeting will be aware that all committee members are now sporting a badge of office. This is to enable members to know who their representatives are, and to allow members to put forward their own suggestions for future events, money raising ideas and recommendations for future speakers.

Claire is looking forward to her term of office and hopes to meet as many members as possible. She would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year or Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda.





Dominic Montserrat

1964–2004

Dominic Montserrat, who has died suddenly at his home in London, was an extraordinarily gifted Egyptologist, who combined his technical work as a scholar with an immense talent for introducing his subject to a wider audience. He was born in Slough on 2 January, 1964.

The most significant facts about him were apparent from the first: he was born a haemophiliac, he was unusually intelligent, and quite remarkably brave. His parents had the rewarding but unenviable task of raising a child who combined outstanding giftedness with fierce independence and extreme physical vulnerability; and his own achievement was in the context of a constant and heroic struggle against debilitating pain.

He studied Egyptology at Durham, and subsequently took an MA and PhD in Classics from University College, London, specialising in Egyptian, Coptic, Greek, and papyrology, to which he added a variety of modern languages, including Arabic. His first job was as a lecturer in Classics at Warwick University, where he made of his office, a plain box in a bleak modern building, a peculiar Aladdin's cave littered with antiquities and mysterious Eastern objects, invariably perfumed with exotic cologne and, despite university regulations, tobacco, in which he presided, unorthodox and interesting, a fin-de-siècle dandy in beautiful clothes. His first book was *Sex and Society in Greco-Roman Egypt* (1996), typically subtle, well-written, wide-ranging, and bizarre.

Dominic's linguistic skills involved him in the compilation of the Dictionary of Manichaean Texts project (a multi-lingual database covering Manichaean texts in Syriac, Coptic, Greek and Latin)—a task which was completed by the late Sarah Clackson and published in 1998. He was co-editor with Professor Sam Lieu of two books: *From Constantine to Julian: Pagan and Byzantine Views* (1996) and *Constantine History, Historiography and Legend* (1998) as well as helping to organize two successful conferences, one on newly discovered Manichaean Texts at the Royal Asiatic

Society in London (1992) and the other on Constantine at Warwick University (1993).

In 2000 he was appointed to the Classical Studies Department in the Open University where he quickly familiarised himself with the needs of life long learners and started enhancing the activity of the Learning and Teaching Subject Network headed by Professor Lorna Hardwick.

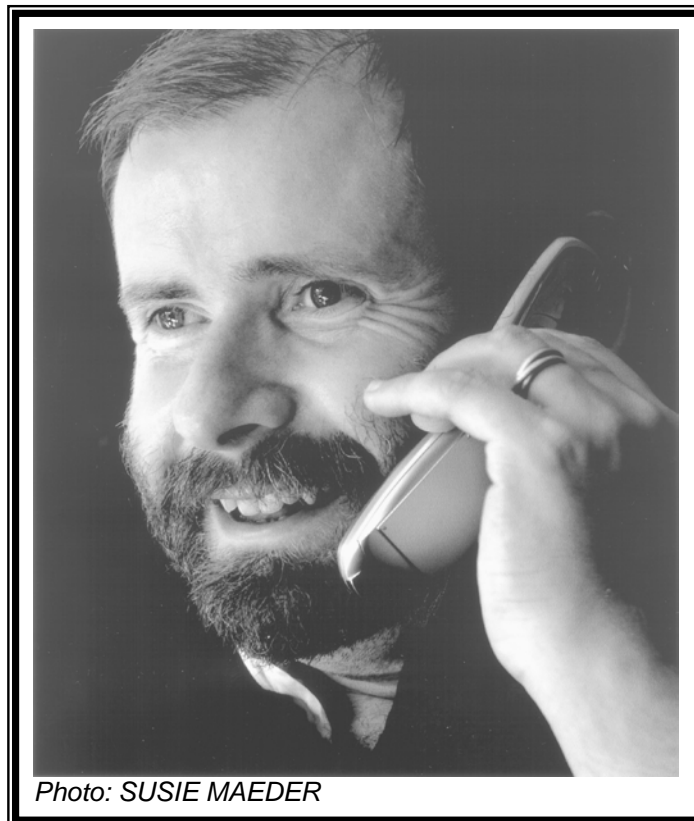


Photo: SUSIE MAEDER

Like many other haemophiliacs, his health was inadvertently undermined by unscreened blood transfusions before the necessity for screening was established, and he contracted hepatitis B and C. In what can only be seen as the final irony, in 2000 he developed Parkinson's Disease. It became clear to him gradually that he was living on borrowed time, and when he felt he could no longer contribute to the flexible distance teaching environment of the Open University, he resigned. Dominic continued to keep in touch with the Department, however, and was considering consultancy work with

the OU on the BBC programme 'What did the Egyptians ever do for us', evidence of his continued commitment to making ancient civilisations exciting and accessible.

In his brief working life, he was nonetheless amazingly productive. As well as his technical works on papyrology, which are of the first quality, he wrote a number of radio plays and other works exploring such topics as mediumistic or fantastic evocations of ancient Egypt. His second book, on the 'heretic pharaoh', *Akhenaten: History, Fantasy, and Ancient Egypt*, also explores these themes and was a work that combined all his gifts: great scholarship, compassion for human failings, wit and humour. In 2000/2001 Dominic curated a major touring exhibition, 'Ancient Egypt: Digging for Dreams', for the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology at UCL. The exhibition was remarkable in its approach to the subject, in acknowledging the interests and concerns of people of African descent, and of those whose interest in ancient Egypt lay outside the academic mainstream. This was hugely successful,





winning the 2002 National Award for Excellence, and was one of his many contributions to the Petrie Museum, of which he was always a devoted friend. It was in the Petrie where he began his academic career as a volunteer between school and college, later cataloguing the cabinets full of records and correspondence, some dating back to the end of the nineteenth century.

Dominic served on the Committee of the Egypt Exploration Society from 1995-1998 and from 1999-2002 and had been, since 2001, a member of the Editorial Board of the Society's magazine, *Egyptian Archaeology*, to which he regularly contributed book reviews and short articles.

His last major project was a series of documentaries for the National Geographic Channel & Channel Five, co-presented with Miriam Cooke, 'The Egypt Detectives', not merely a popularising rehash of the already-known, but in fact, a series which presents genuine and important discoveries in Egyptian archaeology.

With all that, he packed in an extraordinary amount of life into a very few years – he travelled widely and adventurously, particularly in the Middle East, with extraordinary bravery, considering the risks which travel posed for a man for whom a bruise could lead to months of continuous pain. He was an excellent cook, a bon viveur and born entertainer: student drama led effortlessly to his effective performances as a 'talking head' on many TV documentaries and, on one memorable occasion, to an appearance on BBC's Changing Rooms to give his opinion on an Egyptianised dining-room.

He could be, and often was, baroquely generous, of time as well as of money. But he was not any kind of a plaster saint. Free of self-pity himself, he did not tolerate self-pity in others, and he could, on occasions, be

devastating, either when he suspected self-indulgence, or when he felt someone was trying to entrap him into a dependence which he refused to tolerate. On the one hand, his friends were showered with gifts, and more significantly, for a man who knew his own time to be short, he lavished whole weeks on the projects of others. On the other, his wit, an effortless byproduct of his general inventiveness, often had an undertone of melancholy, and could be acid.

For a man who was ferociously private and independent, he was much loved, and made friends easily and often. He was, characteristically, exquisitely polite to anyone in an ancillary role; and years after he left Warwick, porters and cleaners still asked his friends how he was getting on. He lunched almost daily at a restaurant close to his Barbican flat and knew the names and life stories of the waiters. The depth and breadth of his human contacts became apparent only recently, since his intense sense of privacy led him to keep his friends in separate compartments, and in a sense, to be a different person in each of these arenas. It was only at his fortieth birthday party, by which time he was aware that he had very little future to look forward to, that he allowed them to meet. He is survived by his parents and his partner, Robert Lindsey.

Dominic Alexander Sebastian Montserrat

born Slough, 2 January, 1964

died London, 23 September, 2004

Lecturer, University of Warwick, 1992–1999

Project development officer (Classics), Open University, 1999–2002

written by his family and friends

Membership Card Change

Dear Members

Those of you who have joined recently will notice a small change to the membership card. I am now writing the expiry date instead of the joining date on the card, as some members were confused as to when their year membership expired.

This will apply to all memberships on or after the 11th October 2004.

Best wishes

Wendy Goodridge
Membership secretary

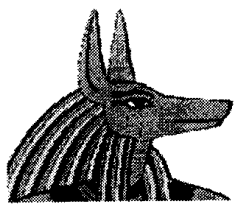
Christmas Closing Dates

The Egypt Centre will close
for the Christmas holiday on
Thursday 23rd December
and will re-open on
Tuesday 4th January.





Shop For Christmas At



The Egypt Centre



The Egypt Centre Shop has many items for presents...

Many Items of Handmade Jewellery by Sara Elam



Statues

Papyrus Pictures

Jewellery

Stationery

Books

Glass



Come in and Browse

Open 10-4, Tuesday

to Saturday Pictures are examples only

Show this poster for 10% discount for Friends Members

