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# Things Past

Newsletter 24, February 2010

**Mount Evelyn History Group Inc**

P.O. Box 101 Mt Evelyn Vic 3796

www.mt-evelyn.net

Enquiries, membership & book sales: Paula Herlihy (President):  
*herlihy@alphalink.com.au* or telephone 9736 2935 and leave message

Newsletter & minutes: Karen Phillips (Secretary), *karen.m.l.phillips@gmail.com*

## Dates for your diary

**History Group meeting Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 7.30pm**, Old Community Link.

**Mt Evelyn Reminiscence Day**, Preparatory day for MEPS' Centenary Celebrations.  
**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> February 10am-4pm**, Mt Evelyn Primary School. All Welcome.

'Tales of Old Mt Evelyn' Listen to and discuss tapes and videos recorded in the 1970s and 1980s. **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March 1pm**, Mt Evelyn Station House.

**Military History Conference 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> April**, Box Hill RSL Hall, details page 4.

## The Herlihys in Egypt

From Singapore we flew Emirates via Dubai to Cairo to join the Intrepid 'Pyramids to Petra' tour. Cairo airport was like a cheap food mall but with money changers and banks instead of food – to our eyes, dirty and disorganised. We were met by the rep from Intrepid and whisked off to Pharaohs Hotel.

The next morning we went to Alexandria by taxi. I wanted to see the Library, which, it turns out, is very new and built on the site of the ancient library. I also wanted to see the remains of the famous Lighthouse on Pharos Island. The site is now occupied by 'The Citadel'. The original mosaic floor and the palm trunks built into the walls to help it withstand earthquakes were all interesting to us. Our taxi driver had warned us not to accept anybody as a guide and so we kept refusing – say yes and you pay!

We travelled there and back using a relatively new and modern road on the western bank of the Nile, and now this area of desert is being opened up for housing and other uses. The traffic in Alexandria and Cairo changes a long trip into a very long trip, so we missed the Intrepid Group meeting, and met our leader Sam and the others the next morning.

We travelled by bus to the Great Pyramids of Giza, and took a camel ride to enjoy the

approach across the desert and away from the crowds. Though the desert sand was littered with rubbish such as old water bottles and plastic bags, it was still incredibly exciting to be on camel back and to watch Egyptians on Arab horses go galloping by, straight out of 'Desert Song'. Though it was hot, it was winter and it rained as we rode the camels.

Things we learnt about Egypt that we hadn't heard before were that since the Nile runs almost exactly from South to North, and the sun rises in the East and sets in the West, the ancient religion of the Egyptians assumed that the east bank was the land of the living and

the west bank the land of the afterlife, hence the pyramids and temples built there. The eastern bank has been populated for centuries with villages and roads, but it has been possible to build the modern road on the western bank and to open up land there because it has been relatively unused.

Pharaohs started preparing for the afterlife as soon as they ascended the throne, so their tombs were built in their lifetime. The pyramids were clad in finished marble and were higher than they are today. The Sphinx is thought to be a lateral solution to the problem of finding a huge block of stone where they wanted to build a road. The road was displaced and the Sphinx was carved and constructed instead.



After this we visited the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities, and learnt a lot about how to interpret the cartouches (nameplates on statues, walls and constructions) and the conventions of colours and stances. One leg forward and arms by side or extended meant the person was alive when the statue was made. Arms crossed across chest generally meant the person was dead when the statue was erected. Black stone generally meant death.

Hieroglyphs may be written from right to left, from left to right, or from top to bottom, the usual direction being from left to right. You first scan to see the way any faces are pointing, and the hieroglyphs face the

beginning of the line.

As a maths teacher, I already had a fair idea of the hieroglyphs for numbers and how they were translated, so it was fascinating to see them *in situ* – in real stone documents. Hieroglyphs we became familiar with included the duck, which indicated the Royal Family, and the symbols for Upper Egypt (the Southern ‘higher’ reaches of the Nile, with symbol *flowering lotus*) and Lower Egypt (the Northern regions nearer the sea, with symbol *papyrus*). Pharaohs were depicted with various different costumes for different purposes, such as false goat hair beards, including female ‘Pharaohs’ such as Hatshepsut.

That night we boarded the sleeper train to Aswan, The Nile Hotel in Aswan was charming and very comfortable. We visited Elephantine Island. We had a very interesting elderly Nubian local guide whose family ‘owned’ the island in times past. Tim and I had Nubian coffee – spicy and yummy.

We had a free day and chose to travel out in an armed convoy across the desert to the new position of the Abu Simbel monument. I recalled all the publicity at the time of the building of the Aswan Dam – the United Nations declared it a World Heritage site and denied a loan to Egypt to build the Aswan Dam, which would flood the area. Russia funded the Dam. A campaign to move Abu Simbel before the waters covered it was conducted all over the world. I remember contributing a tiny amount of money when I was a student and so it was interesting to see the results of the international campaign.

The next morning we boarded a Nile sailing boat called a felucca. All meals were vegetarian and prepared on board and delicious. No toilets, so we made shore stops and when we camped for the night to sleep on board we dug a pit toilet on shore surrounded by a canvas ‘modesty’ tent à la Confest.

On our way to Luxor, we visited the Temple of Horus at Edfou, begun in 237 BC. David Roberts' sketches of 'Egypt and the Holy Land', drawn in 1838-9 show these sites before excavation. It is clear that the sand came right up to within a metre or so of the ceiling, and the locals lived in mud huts all over the ruins. I was at a loss to understand how the ceilings could be so black because they are so high. After seeing Roberts' sketches, I now realise the sand covered and protected the bases of the columns but not the ceiling. The fires of the locals living in the ruins could have blackened the ceilings, which were 'low' at that time.

We went on to visit the vast and impressive Karnak temple. This is a huge group of ruins which is in the process of being returned to something like its original plan, specifically removal of the houses and sand that cover the old road up from the Nile, flanked with



**The same temple today, cleared of sand.**

sphinxes or rams heads or whatever. I think this will be an amazing sight when complete.

The Valley of the Kings (one of the 'Cities of the Dead' on the West bank of the Nile opposite the ancient city of Thebes) was fascinating. The Valley lies behind a natural pyramid formation and the Colossi of

Memnon. Pharaohs knew that the graves were at risk of being robbed, and the Valley of the Kings was a great secret, its location not widely known, and accessed only by narrow donkey trails. Artisans were paid large sums of money to live there with their families for generations to keep the secret.

Entry is by donkey track or single file path. For that reason hot air ballooning over the Valley and donkey rides in are the norm. Tombs were dug into the walls of the valley and, on the few occasions other tombs were accidentally encountered, the wall was rebuilt and the passageway dog-legged. To avoid this, passages to tombs were dug at different angles at different periods.

We saw the tomb of Tutankhamen in the Valley of the Kings, though we did not enter it. Most of the contents are on display in museums, including the succession of coffins encasing his mummy, and we marvelled at them and the well known gold head mask. Tutankhamen was a child when he became Pharaoh and reigned for approximately ten years. His injuries suggest that he may have died at about 18 from an accident, such as falling from his horse.

Although his tomb is small (no doubt because he was so young) it is significant because it is the most complete ancient Egyptian royal tomb ever found. It escaped pillage because it was hidden under other tombs and its very existence was unsuspected for many years. The entrance was hidden under workers' huts, and was the last spot Carter the discoverer dug.

After that we visited the temple of Hatshepsut (the famous female pharaoh, shown with goat hair beard, as were the other pharaohs), and we 'antiquitied' ourselves to exhaustion point.

We crossed the Suez Canal and had a long drive in the Sinai Peninsula. Sinai is dry dry dry. It is illegal to cut down mimosa trees, though branches which fall to the ground can be gathered for fire wood. We climbed the lower reaches of Mt Sinai by camel, and the last section on foot. We got to the top in time for sunset and a photo, and then climbed down on foot using torches.

The next morning we visited St Katherine's monastery, which is populated by 14 Cypriot monks and protected by Muslim soldiers. The church was established centuries ago to protect Moses' burning bush, which is still there. From St Katharine's we went on to Sawa

Camp on the Red Sea, where we had a hut on the beach. Intrepid describes it as 'Paradise' and it comes close.

***Edited extract from Paula's description of her travels. Next issue: Jordan.***

## **Beginning Family History**

Librarian Anne Dixon gave a very helpful talk on getting started in family history.

Start with yourself! Give your descendants your story straight from the horse's mouth. Interview elderly relatives, if they're willing. Above all, family history needs to be traced step by step from one generation to another. The primary sources are usually certificates of births, deaths and marriages, or entries in parish registers. There is no point in claiming a relationship to some famous or aristocratic personage with the same family name, if you can't prove the connection.

Other useful records include newspapers, directories, shipping records, wills, cemetery records and, for military history, the Australian War Memorial. Check out Family History on the Eastern Regional Libraries website. Online resources Ancestry and Find My Past can be used free at the libraries. The State Library, Public Records Office and the Latter Day Saints also hold valuable resources. Family historians could consider joining either the Australian Institute of Genealogical Studies (AIGS) or the Genealogical Society of Victoria.

Anne stressed the importance of proper record keeping, a consistent filing system and methodical research. She advised against relying solely on computer systems; documentation should be preserved as well. Original documents should be kept in acid free sleeves, available from AIGS Blackburn.

Anne, who is also a costume historian, unpacked an unusual black and cream wrap-around frock dating from the 1920s, that had just arrived from America.

Apologies to those who did not receive the updated time for Anne's talk. It's advisable to check times/dates/venues when booking, as details on our yearly agenda may change.

## **The Memory Bank**

On the 23rd March, the Museum's Memory Bank project will be at the Mt Evelyn Station House from 1.00pm onwards. We invite the community to bring photos taken in the Shire of Yarra Ranges from the 1950s on, have them scanned and tell us the story of the photo.

***From Gil Bosaid***

## **The PROV Community**

PROVcommunity is a trial initiative by the Public Records Office of Victoria to explore ways in which we can promote understanding of the state archives through community discussion in an online environment.

PROVcommunity is a virtual meeting place where researchers can share, discuss and ask questions about the Victorian state archives in a relaxed and welcoming environment. You can add photos and videos, check out the latest news in the archives world, form a group and hopefully get to meet some really interesting people!

So if you are interested in increasing your understanding of the state archives and the people who use them, why not take a visit to:

<http://provcommunity.ning.com/> The answer to your next research question could be closer than you think. If you are after authoritative advice on the state records please visit our website at:

<http://prov.vic.gov.au>

***From Joan Hunt, mc2 Forum for History Victoria Support Group***

## **Military History Conference**

The Military Historical Society of Australia (Victorian Branch) invites military history aficionados to attend the MHSA National Biennial Conference, in part or in full, over the Easter weekend of 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> April at the Box Hill RSL.

Dates: Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> and half day Monday 5<sup>th</sup> 2010. Venue: Box Hill RSL, 26-28 Nelson Road, Box Hill. Costs: see website. Convener: Andrew Kilsby, tel 0408 342 795 email: [conference@mhsa.org.au](mailto:conference@mhsa.org.au)

Full programme details, costs and registration form available on the MHSa website: [http://www.mhsa.org.au/national\\_conferences.html](http://www.mhsa.org.au/national_conferences.html)

*From Alan Bennett, Librarian*

### **MEPS history (from minutes)**

The original book (first 75 years) will remain the same except for some editorial changes. The next 25 years will be added and a new print run of 1000 books will be completed for the Centenary later on in the year. Anne Welsh is chasing up original photographs from the 75<sup>th</sup> history book. These will scan better in the new book.

Paula has commenced work on the new section 1985-2010 and is keen to get as much information as she can for the content, e.g. school newsletters, minutes of School Council and Parents Committee for these years.

### **From Kev's rain gauge**

Rainfall for January 2010 for Mt Evelyn, Melbourne and Melbourne monthly average:

<b>Mt Ev</b>	<b>Melb</b>	<b>Melb Av</b>
56.8mm	22.6mm	47.6mm

*Kevin Phillips*