

THE ORIENT EXPRESS

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Oriental Museum

No.
September 2021

49

Editor: Sue Childs
The Friends of the Oriental Museum
Oriental Museum
Elvet Hill, Durham, DH1 3TH
Tel: 0191 334 5691
Email: fomdurham@fastmail.co.uk

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

Sue Childs

Welcome to my first Oriental Express Notes since I became Chair of the Friends of the Oriental Museum in the AGM on 29th November 2020. I've been the Chair in the past and am pleased to be back in post as being involved with the Oriental Museum and its marvellous collections and hard-working staff is such a privilege.

Thank you all for your commitment to the Friends and to the Museum during the difficult times we have been having. Details are still uncertain as we do not yet know what access we will have to Museum and University premises for holding our lectures, previews and other events. When this becomes clearer we will let you know.

A sad event in December 2020 was the death of Professor Sir Arnold Wolfendale, FRS, our President. He was a very valued and supportive member of the Friends, giving us many interesting talks at our AGMs, and always there with pertinent questions for the speakers at our lectures. He will be very much missed.

I look forward to our 2021/22 programme and hope to see you at our lectures or events, circumstances permitting.

Warm wishes *Sue*

Last Season's Lectures

Despite the pandemic restrictions we were able to provide some lectures in the 2020/21 season taking advantage of Zoom and providing online access. Summaries of the lectures were then circulated to all Friends by email or by post.

Our usual joint meeting with the North East Ancient Egypt Society (NEAESOC) was held on the 10th October 2020. Dr Ross Thomas of the British Museum talked about the '*Function of Terracotta and Other Figurines of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods in Egypt*'. Ross is a curator at the British Museum and Director of fieldwork at the site of Naukratis, an ancient Greek settlement in the Nile River delta. He is a specialist in survey techniques as well as pottery and terracotta figures.

Following on from this joint lecture, we held our first Friends lecture on November 25th. Dr Elena Narinskaya, from the

Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Oxford, talked about *'Eastern Orthodox Christianity'* focussing on Syriac Christianity. The Golden Age of Syriac Christianity was in the 3rd to 7th centuries CE, starting in Syria and the near East but spreading as far a field as India. Because of controversy about the divine and human nature of Jesus, the Syriac Church split in the 5th century into the 'Syrian Orthodox Church' and the 'Church of the East'. Today, Syrian Orthodox communities are to be found in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and India (Kerala). There is also a sizeable diaspora in Western Europe (Germany, Sweden, Holland) and America.

The AGM on 29th November was also held successfully on Zoom.

Rachel Barclay, the Museum Curator, gave us an update of the work of the Museum on January 13th 2021. In her talk *'A rough diamond: the Oriental Museum's 60th anniversary year and plans for the future'* Rachel described how the Museum has been operating under Covid restrictions. Teaching activities have continued, both via online means, and in person using masks and social distancing. The collections and events have been made publicly available online. The Museum continues its policy of collecting modern material (which will become historic artefacts in the future) and has been collecting material related to Covid such as images and health adverts. Work has also been undertaken to plan for the future reopening. A major activity has been reorganising the storage areas in the Museum.

On February 3rd Prof Paul Luft, Honorary Fellow, Durham University, gave a talk on *'The Qajar Rock Reliefs'*. The Qajar dynasty of Shahs of Persia ran from 1789 to 1925. The second Shah of this dynasty – Fath Ali Shah – looked back to the long-

standing tradition of rock reliefs in Persia and created his own, and this was continued by two of his sons and one of his grandsons. Rock reliefs – monumental works of art, placed in prominent positions besides roads and near sources of water – are intended to be easily seen by the people and have the purpose of glorifying and propagating the Shah's rule.

We had a lecture on *'Reading Japanese gardens'* on 31st March given by Anna-Rose Shack, PhD Candidate, University of Amsterdam. She looked at the interconnection between literature and Japanese gardens. She discussed the role of the garden within traditional Japanese literature including poetry. The design of gardens themselves reflected literature in the sense that all the built structures and plants and external views and landscape are very specifically chosen and considered to create the overall effect in the way that individual pieces of writing are very structured to create the final work.

ORIENTAL MUSEUM OPENING HOURS AND BOOKING INFORMATION

As at September 2021

- Monday–Tuesday: closed to allow for gallery-based university teaching and live streamed teaching into schools
- Wednesday–Friday: open 10am to 4pm
- Weekends: open 12 noon to 4pm

Entry is free to all visitors but Museum staff are monitoring visitor numbers closely to allow plenty of space and avoid overcrowding. As such, pre-booking online is recommended before your visit. The pre-bookable slots are made available each Monday for the week ahead. You can make your booking at:

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/oriental.museum/visit/>

Look on the right hand side of the page for the section on opening hours and admission and click on the link for the day of your choice.

NOTICES

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are due by 1st October 2021.

- Family – £25
- Individual – £15
- Concession (individual) – £10

Subscription requests will be conducted via email and online documents, and via the post for people without an email address. Membership cards will be sent out in the post.

Notice of the Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held on Sunday 5th December, 3pm. It is hoped that this can be held in the Museum, followed by the opportunity to socialise over 'Christmas' drinks. If this is not possible the AGM will again be held over Zoom.

Matters for discussion should be submitted to the Chair on fomdurham@fastmail.co.uk, or by post (to the address at the top of this newsletter), to be received 14 days before the meeting.

Agenda will comprise:

- Minutes of the previous meeting, and matters arising
- Chair's Report
- Treasurer's Report, independently examined accounts, and appointment of independent examiner
- Secretary's Report
- Museum Curator's report
- Election of Officers and Members of the Council
- Submitted discussion topic(s)
- Any other business

Current Members of the Council

Chair – Sue Childs

Vice Chair – Anne Bothwell

Hon. Treasurer – Brian Straughan

Hon. Secretary – Jane Manley

Members – Ruth Crofton, Lyn Gatland, Keith Pratt, Charlotte Spink, Ian Stewart, Malcolm Walker, Penny Wilson, Dorothy Wolfendale

Ralph Austin has stepped down from being a member of Council. We thank him so much for his commitment to and support for the Friends and for all the work he has put in his times as Chair and as Vice-Chair. We particularly note how he made the year of the Friends' 25th anniversary so successful.

The Council wished to mark Ralph's enormous contribution in a permanent way and so approached Rachel, the Museum's Curator, for ideas.

In autumn 2022 the Museum will be marking the centenary of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun with an exhibition focused on its ancient Egyptian collections. There are one or two key pieces which it has not been possible to display until now which the Museum would hope to include in this exhibition. They would need conservation and specialist mounts but once mounted could potentially be included in the displays permanently. It has not been possible to confirm details at this time, as it is still difficult for external contractors to work on site at the Museum. However, the Museum staff hope to progress these plans over the coming months and, with the support of the Friends, include a fitting tribute to Ralph within this exhibition.

Annual Dinner

3rd November at 6.30pm for 7pm at Ramside Hall Hotel. The invitation and booking form have been circulated to the Friends. We hope to see you there.

Mahjong Group

The Mahjong Group has resumed in the Museum (in the Spalding Room) on the second Sunday of the month 1.45pm to 4pm. Numbers at a session are currently restricted to 6 so please contact Sue Childs in advance at the email address below to book a place:

fomdurham@fastmail.co.uk

FRIENDS LECTURE PROGRAMME 2021 to 2022

Normally lectures are held in Room 009, Elvet Hill House (next door to the Oriental Museum) on Wednesday evenings at 7.30pm, unless otherwise stated.

Currently we do not know when access to Museum and University premises will become available. Therefore lectures and events will be held using either Zoom or a meeting in person, depending on the circumstances. We will let you know the method to be used for each event as soon as we can.

If you have any queries please contact Sue Childs at:

fomdurham@fastmail.co.uk

Preview of Silk Road Gallery {date to be arranged}

Saturday 9th October 2021, 2pm to 4pm
Joint session with NEAESOC. By Zoom
Gianluca Miniaci. Associate Professor,
Department of Civilization and Forms of
Knowledge, University of Pisa
'The Middle Kingdom World in Miniature'

Wednesday 10th November 2021, 7.30pm
David Rosier
*'The Origins & Evolution of Chinese
Imperial Silk - Heaven's Embroidered
Cloth'*

Wednesday 26th January 2022, 7.30pm
Dr Penny Wilson, Associate Professor,
Department of Archaeology, Durham
University
'Hieroglyphics'

Wednesday 23rd February 2022, 7.30pm
Charlotte Spink, Learning Assistant,
Durham University Museums
*'Community Engagement: Moving towards
accessible, inclusive and collaborative
ways of working at the Oriental Museum'*

Dr Craig Barclay, Head of Museums,
Galleries and Exhibitions, Durham
University
Coin handling session {date to be
arranged}

Mid-April {precise date to be fixed closer
to the time depending on flowering}
Mike Hughes, Botanic Garden Manager,
Durham University
'Oriental' themed guided walking tour of
the Botanic Gardens

May {to be arranged}

ORIENTAL MUSEUM ANNUAL REPORT 2020 to 2021

Rachel Barclay, Curator

I began the report for 2019/20 by saying that it has been 'a year unlike any other in the Oriental Museum's history'. It seems an equally suitable way to begin this year's report. It has been another very strange year but, despite some difficulties, it has also been a very successful one.

Staff have been back on site at the Museum full time since the start of August 2020 but it was the 19th May 2021 before we opened to the public. So what were we doing in the meantime?

For the curatorial team, our major focus for much of the year has been supporting University teaching, both online and, whenever possible, face to face. The team

contacted every academic who usually works with the Oriental Museum collections as part of their teaching and we agreed a bespoke solution for each module for the year 2020/21.

For those modules that were being taught online, solutions included taking additional photography of collections, creating 3D scans and filming videos of staff handling the objects. Academics could then use these as they wished as part of their classes. Some academics also came into the museum and we live-streamed sessions from the galleries so that they could engage the students as directly as possible with the objects.

Whenever possible we continued to teach face to face. Curators delivered lectures and seminars with small groups of students. We also arranged for students with very object-focused courses to come in to study their objects individually or in small groups. As we moved further into 2021 and life began to open up again, we were able to recommence placements in the museum and increase the amount of face to face teaching. It was wonderful to be able to finally meet students we had only seen as a small face on a screen for so many months.

Our major events programme also went digital. The team worked with students and local community members to produce a range of online content to help students and families to celebrate festivals like Diwali and Lunar New Year safely at home.

Little Dragons, our Under 5s group, also went online, with weekly videos being released each Wednesday morning attracting between 30 and 50 families each week.

Even our exhibition programme went online with our MA Museum and Artefact

Studies students producing a wonderful exhibition, *Jericho: An Ancient City Revealed*, exploring the significance of the work of pioneering archaeologist Dame Kathleen Kenyon at the site of ancient Jericho. This was accompanied by a podcast series and a range of online activities for families.

As well as all of our online activity, we made the most of being closed to the public to undertake a range of work that would be impossible to do safely while the museum was open. As a result, a completely new fire detection system has been installed together with a vastly improved Wi-Fi system and upgrades to our security systems. All of this is invisible to visitors but is essential for the care of the collections and a better experience for our visitors.

In the galleries, we completed the changes required in the MacDonald gallery following the closure of the *Marvels of China* gallery to ensure that we could continue to support our popular Lunar New Year and Shang China primary school sessions. Work also recommenced on the installation of the new *Silk Roads* gallery.

This had been due to open in May 2020 as the final stage in the redevelopment of the permanent galleries but work had to stop completely that March. The focus on creating new online teaching materials meant that work did not recommence in earnest until early 2021. Staff were then able to begin to install the displays. The project was further delayed by difficulties as suppliers were hit by Covid outbreaks and some materials proved difficult to source due to transport delays. In August 2021 we were finally able to invite all the community members who had contributed to the project back on site to see the gallery and give their feedback on the work up to that point. That feedback is

now being used to finalise the displays and labelling.

By far the biggest project we have undertaken during this year has been the complete redevelopment and refurbishment of our stores and research spaces. In common with most museums, more than 95% of our collections are not on display. This is ideal for a university museum as it allows us to use this material to support teaching and research. However, our storage spaces were last fitted out in 1964 and were urgently in need of modernisation. We also had a very restricted space for visiting researchers to work in, which has meant that we could not really accommodate more than one visitor at a time.

With funding from the AHRC we have been able to completely transform our research facilities. Our stores are now fitted with state of the art museum-grade storage with specialist areas for framed works of art, human remains, plastics, lacquer, metalwork and textiles, all of which have particular requirements. The installation of roller-racking in our largest store, rather than fixed racking, has increased storage capacity creating space for newly acquired collections and a greatly improved staff work space.

None of this would have been possible while the museum was open as we used the galleries as temporary storage space for the collections. In the space of just three months the small number of staff permitted on site moved more than 35,000 objects out of storage onto temporary racking in the galleries and back into the new storage. We got a lot of exercise!

At the same time our new research centre and archive can now host up to four visiting researchers at a time. Throughout the pandemic we have aimed to support researchers online but it was wonderful to

welcome our first researchers back into the museum from May 2021 to work with the collections in the large, flexible, light and airy new research centre. We have also been able to accommodate placement students who would otherwise have missed out on any practical experience over the year. Researchers from across the UK and Europe are beginning to book visits in and we look forward to welcoming researchers from further afield as restrictions lift.

Restrictions were still in place when we reopened in May 2021. We are open five days a week rather than seven. Staying closed on Monday and Tuesday allows us to continue to live stream into schools from the galleries and host university teaching sessions in the larger air space in the galleries which would not be possible in our classrooms. We have also followed government guidance, asking visitors to pre-book for a timed slot so that we can restrict numbers in the museum to safe limits. Many of our interactive elements such as dressing up and children's games have had to go into storage and physical gallery guides have been replaced, temporarily, with QR codes. Our café and shop also remained closed to begin with, only reopening gradually as restrictions eased.

Our opening exhibition was *Lu Xun's Legacy: Printmaking in Modern China*. Lu Xun (1881-1936) is the pen name of the revolutionary Chinese writer Zhou Shuren. Arguably one of the most important cultural figures of 20th century China, Lu Xun was a leading left-wing writer and print-maker and a passionate critic of the cultural and political conditions in early 20th century China. He transformed the neglected art of woodblock printing, invented in China more than 1000 years earlier, making the woodblock print a weapon for social change and national resistance.

This retrospective included fifty-three prints drawn from the collections of the Muban Educational Trust, chosen to represent every decade since Lu Xun founded the Modern Woodcut Movement in the 1930s. The exhibition explored artistic trends, political conflict and technical innovations. This exhibition was due to be displayed at the museum between January and May 2021. We are extremely grateful to our partners at the Muban Educational Trust and SOAS for making it possible for us to keep the exhibition until the end of August so that we could share it with our visitors and students.

Visitors have also been able to enjoy two art installations in the galleries over the summer. *Silla Collection 100* project by Korean metalworker and jeweller Seeun Kim brought ancient Korean jewellery into the 21st century. *Uterine Dreams: Sculptor, Heal Thyself*, an installation by sculptor and photographer Sarah Danays, continues in the Thacker Gallery, using objects from the Oriental Museum's Egyptian collections as part of the inspiration for a powerful exploration of the subject of miscarriage and the distress caused by the loss of a child.

As we look forward to the new academic year, there is much to be hopeful about. We are starting to catalogue a wonderful new collection of pieces transferred from the Derbyshire Schools Service following its closure. This eclectic collection includes several pieces which we can include in the new *Silk Roads* gallery as it continues to evolve. We have a packed exhibitions programme planned for 2021/22 and more teaching than ever before booked in to the diary.

We have missed our Friends over the last 18 months and we look forward to welcoming you back too. We hope to see you all at the Museum over the coming year.

ORIENTAL MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS 2021 to 2022

Rachel Barclay, Curator

Taxila in Focus: 100 years since Marshall

24 September 2021 to 16 January 2022

The ancient cities and monuments of the Taxila Valley form a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Pakistan. The focus of excavations by the British archaeologist, Sir John Marshall in the early 20th century, these investigations were recorded in a detailed photographic archive.

This exhibition focuses on the ancient site of Taxila, around 32 kilometres from Pakistan's federal capital, Islamabad. Taxila, translated by many as 'city of cut stone', was a cosmopolitan settlement and a major trading hub. Mentioned in the ancient South Asian epic, the Ramayana, and early Buddhist and Jain traditions, Taxila was one of the ancient capitals of Gandhara, an important territory stretching between the Oxus and Indus Rivers. A revered place of education, it flourished for centuries, benefiting from the flow of goods, ideas and faiths that travelled along the famed Silk Roads.

This significance drew archaeologists to the site, including Sir John Hubert Marshall CIE, FBA (1876-1958) and the Oriental Museum is now home to nearly 5000 images from his personal archives. While Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India for almost 30 years from 1902 Marshall collected photographs and technical drawings of many significant sites and monuments across the modern states of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Pakistan. These include photographs from the excavations he directed at Taxila.

These records can tell us much about the archaeological remains of Taxila, but also

about the practice of archaeology in early 20th century South Asia. *Taxila in Focus* compares this historic imagery with contemporary photographs to document the site's development since Marshall, as well as new discoveries. It also highlights how Marshall's archive can contribute to the management and protection of these important historic sites in the present and the future.

In addition to the exhibition at the Oriental Museum, you will also be also enjoy our online exhibition, available in either English or Urdu from 24th September.

This exhibition has been created in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Pakistan and the UNESCO Chair in Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage.

Monogatari: the art of storytelling in Japanese woodblock prints
28 January 2022 to May 2022

A partnership with the National Museum of Japanese History, this exhibition will be the first opportunity for visitors to enjoy the J P Scott Collection of Japanese woodblock prints donated to the Oriental Museum in 2019.

The exhibition explores how Japanese prints were used to illustrate famous tales of samurai, travellers and heroes during the 18th and 19th centuries and how this style evolved to tell real life news stories of battles in the early 20th century of the Russo-Japanese and Sino-Japanese wars.

Indian miniature painting – title to be confirmed
May/June 2022 to September 2022

This exhibition will highlight the work of a group of contemporary miniature painters working in Udaipur, Rajasthan.

Miniature painting was introduced to India by the Mughal emperors who brought master painters from Persia to teach the art form to Indian artists. The resulting fusion of Persian and Indian style developed into many different schools across the regions of the Mughal Empire. Traditional miniature painting focused on the lives of the rulers, featuring the ruler hunting, love making, feasting or recording other details of their lives. Contemporary miniature painting mixes these traditional themes with contemporary designs but has an almost wholly non-Indian audience, existing today almost completely as an art form purchased by tourists.

All of the works for the exhibition were donated to the Oriental Museum by Dr Simon Fleming. A number of artists will feature in the exhibition including Gopal Kumawat and his father Ramchandra and grandfather Chatarbhut.

Russian Folk Art title to be confirmed
June to September 2022

MA Museum and Artefact Studies exhibition based around the collection of Russian folk art in the Oriental Museum created by artist Kirill Sokolov and donated to the museum by his widow, Dr Avril Sokolov, after his death. The exhibition will link to a partner exhibition curated by MA Visual Culture students on the Kirill Sokolov artworks in the University Art Collection.

Exhibition previews

Due to Covid restrictions it is not yet possible to confirm dates for exhibition previews. We hope to reinstate these as soon as possible but the health and safety of all of our visitors and staff remains our top priority.

To check the start and end date of exhibitions before you visit consult the Museum's website

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/oriental.museum/whatson/>
or ring the Museum on 0191 334 5691