



The Egyptologist Robert Hay (1799–1863)

Robert Hay was born in Duns Castle, Berwickshire, in the Scottish Borders, and first visited Alexandria in 1818. In November 1824 he set off for Egypt again to record inscriptions and make architectural plans of all the major monuments there. Hay stayed in Egypt until 1828 and lived there again from 1829 to 1834. With a wide circle of interesting friends, Hay employed many now famous artists and was a fine water-colourist himself.

Robert Hay and his friends have always been at the heart of the foundation and growth of ASTENE. In the 1990s, a small group of researchers, including Neil Cooke, John Ruffle, Michel Azim and Jason Thompson, had corresponded as they struggled to correlate conflicting data in the diaries and papers of, and letters between, Robert Hay and his friends. This correspondence led to a well-attended conference held at the Oriental Museum in Durham in 1995 entitled 'Travellers in Egypt', organised there by John Ruffle and Janet Starkey, with the support of other researchers, including Paul Starkey, Deborah Manley and Peta Rée. The idea was to get a few scholars of nineteenth-century Egypt together to try to work out who was where when, and who met whom where. This idea caught the imagination of specialists in a number of related fields, who presented a wide variety of delightful studies. Almost all were based on original research, and often from little-known sources. This successful conference led to a well-respected book, *Travellers in Egypt*, edited by Paul and Janet Starkey and published by IB Tauris in 1998, which was supported by the Centre of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies and the University of Durham's Publications Board. Further biennial conferences and subsequent publications followed and led to the formation of ASTENE at an Oxford conference in 1997.

It is therefore a true delight to return to a topic that was at the heart of the inception of ASTENE in the form of a two-day seminar about Robert Hay and his friends. It is especially relevant to hold the event in Duns, where Robert Hay was born — and just after Duns Castle

and Duns community celebrated its 700th anniversary in 2020. This Seminar will be of great local and international interest, so all are welcome to hear about Duns's connections with Egypt!

