

# THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF TRAVEL IN EGYPT AND THE NEAR EAST

Chairman's Annual Report, July 2012

In the year following the excitement of a successful ASTENE conference (on which full reports have already appeared in Bulletins) life might seem dull, but there has been plenty of activity to report. First, we remember with respect three members who have died; Elaine Evans, Peter H. Clayton and Anne Revell. Tributes were published in the Bulletin. In addition I would like to renew our sympathies to Rosalind Janssen on the death of her husband Jac and to thank her for having fulfilled her duties as Secretary for as long as she was able. Understandably she has had to retire from the role due to the pressures of her changed circumstances and I am grateful to Patricia Usick and Lucy Pollard for helping with the minutes of meetings when Rosalind was unable to do so.

The committee of Trustees met five times during the year, in July, October and December 2011 and in March and May 2012. We are grateful to Neil Cooke for the use of his office for these meetings. We started the year with several Trustee places vacant so were delighted that three members, Edwin Aiken, Cathie Bryan and Jacke Phillips, agreed to be co-opted later in the year and to stand for election at the forthcoming AGM.

Four issues of the Bulletin have appeared since the last AGM, two edited by Russell McGuirk (Nos. 50 and 51) and two by Robert Morkot (Nos. 49 and 52). I would like to thank Myra Green especially for managing the excellent book review section of the Bulletin. Members will have noticed various experiments made with the lay-out of the Bulletin to make it more readable and I hope that they are happy with the results. Thanks go to Karen Dorn and Diane Fortenberry for this re-design work. Special thanks also to Diane Fortenberry who has handled the preparation of printer-ready copy for many of the Bulletins over the past few years. To alleviate the pressure on Diane we will be testing a trial lay-out by Press-to-Print for Bulletin 54. The new Bulletin distribution arrangement is working well and again we thank Karen Dorn for negotiating this with the printers.

Keeping the website current continues to be a challenge. Unfortunately the new webmaster could not regularly respond to inputs as we would have wished. I am grateful to Janet Rady who has worked hard on many aspects of the website, including discussions with two providers who were invited to quote for a completely new website. The objective was to move to a design which incorporated a "Content Management System" where ASTENE would not be so dependent on a paid webmaster. The reality, however, is that no Trustee to date has the time or inclination to manage the content in-house. If we see the website primarily as the means by which we share our information freely with the wider public as part of our aims and objectives, and less as a means of communicating time-sensitive information to members, then so long as the website can be kept sufficiently current for non-members to know what we stand for and how to contact us, the need for a complete re-design becomes less urgent and is not being pursued at present.

This is the first year that we have used the web-based email addresses and members are gradually becoming more used to this means of communication. It is not perfect but has the merit of not needing a change of email address when the Association's officers change. We are also experimenting with group email techniques offered free by Mailchimp and again we thank Janet Rady for her work on this.

Membership is somewhat down on prior years, but we hope that with further follow-ups members who have not yet renewed their membership at the time of writing will eventually re-join. Fortunately Neil Cooke is now keeping a record of past members on the 'ASTENE Membership' list of interests so we hope to keep in touch with old friends. We thank Neil Cooke and Karen Dorn for keeping this listing up-dated.

The Trustees, and in particular our three Honorary officers, President Jaromir Malek and Vice Presidents Lisa French and Malcolm Wagstaff, have had several brainstorming sessions on how to recruit a new generation of members to keep ASTENE vibrant and effective. There are plans for an essay prize and more joint events with related organisations. A new membership application flyer was designed by Diane Fortenberry which in the absence of other promotional material is useful as publicity whenever members attend meetings, conferences or seminars. Karen Dorn arranged the printing and I urge members to display and distribute these flyers where appropriate.

Hana Navratilova has been very active on the international front to re-establish the network of overseas members; she has identified key activists in Belgium, Austria and Egypt and we are all most grateful to her for her energy, creativity and dedication and to the members who have agreed to support her efforts (Amanda Heggstad; Johanna Holaubek; Cynthia Sheikholeslami).

In April Malcolm Wagstaff directed the ASTENE Study Day at Rewley House, which was enjoyed by many members, and Patricia Usick organised a tour of the new Ashmolean Egyptian Galleries the evening before. Dr Usick also coordinated an ASTENE tie-in with the British Egyptian Society for a private visit in March to the British Museum's Hajj exhibition. Deb Manley put together the successful visit to Ireland in May where the group of seven who travelled in from elsewhere were joined by three Irish members. Jennifer Scarce is actively promoting ASTENE in Scotland. We hope this will lead to ASTENE events in Scotland in future. As Events Secretary Patricia Usick has organised two further activities for 2012; the visit to Leighton House in conjunction with the AGM and the walk and talk in Kensal Green Cemetery in September, with Cathie Bryan. Dr Usick has started work on the ASTENE 2013 conference at Aston University and Elisabeth Woodthorpe and Robert Morkot are well advanced with arrangements for the planned trip to Jordan in April 2013.

Deb Manley, Jaromir Malek and Diane Fortenberry met as a Publications sub-committee to put together the ASTENE book following the St Anne's conference. Diane Fortenberry is editing the book and should by now have received all final copy from the contributors. For the past year Oxbow reports the following sales of our existing list: *Knowledge is Light*: 135; *Saddling the Dogs*: 24; *Who Travels Sees More*: 30; *Women Travellers in the Near East*: 49. The digitised archive of Hoskins material at the Griffiths Institute, for which ASTENE awarded a grant in 2011, is now live and very beautiful. The "Who was Where, When and with Whom" (WWWW) project has been resuscitated by Dr Jaromir Malek, who will create and test a sample database of information (not necessarily dependent on the website). We look forward to reports of progress on this long-held ASTENE ambition.

The Trustees have carefully considered the issue of revising and updating the ASTENE constitution to stay in line with the latest Charities Commission guidance and the practice of other similar associations. Thanks go to Robert Morkot for his groundwork on this matter. ASTENE does not have property or employees. Therefore the consensus of opinion was that the risks incurred by ASTENE in accomplishing its aims were not of a nature to justify the complicated and arduous procedures for incorporating as a Company Limited by Guarantee. The less onerous route would be to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Although a standard model constitution is offered by the Charities Commission for this simpler form of incorporation, the legal status itself has not yet come into effect. The Trustees have therefore decided that for the types of contracts and commitments which ASTENE undertakes (the Conference, publications, group visits etc) it was acceptable to continue to purchase insurance cover. Therefore we decided not to ask members to vote on changes to the existing constitution until such time as the Charitable Incorporated Organisation system is active. The changes recommended by the Trustees were not radical and a year's delay should not cause problems.

When I agreed to act as Chairman in July 2011 I asked that members volunteer to help with the many tasks which have kept the Association going for fifteen years. As you can see from this report, many people have indeed worked hard to keep the wheels turning. But we still need a member to act as Secretary in Rosalind's place. Karen Dorn's term as Treasurer has also come to an end. Karen has been a dedicated, meticulous and conscientious Treasurer and Membership Secretary and her contribution has not been limited to the finances of the Association. We thank her for the many hours she has spent on problems with bank accounts and changes of signatory and for her regular attendance at meetings to share information on the accounts. She will be presenting her annual Treasurer's report to the AGM in July. If any member would like to take over this vital role please contact Karen or me to learn more about the job.

Finally I also am relinquishing the Chairman's position, as was always the plan, though not publicised. We are very fortunate indeed that one of our founder members, Neil Cooke, is now able to take on the role of Chairman and he will be standing for election at the AGM which I hope a great many members will attend. It will be an opportunity to share your work over the past year and to catch up with friends.