

James Leslie Starkey

Archaeologist

PART 2 (ii)

Lachish

By Wendy Slaninka (Granddaughter of James & Marjorie Starkey by their daughter Mary)

This is my sixth article for Filming Antiquity directly following on from my previous article Part 2 (i) Lachish. It also links in with earlier articles 'James Leslie Starkey, Archaeologist, Part 1, Background and Early Career', 'Living at Lachish – Life in Camp', 'First Lady of Lachish – Marjorie Starkey and her family', and 'Olive Starkey – Lady of Lachish' (Leslie's sister), where there is other information and photos of Leslie and Lachish.

“Archaeology is the handmaiden of History”

Sir Charles Marston
(The Bible comes Alive)



Photo: Family archive, W.Slaninka

When Starkey left Petrie for Lachish, Olga Tufnell, Harris and Theresa Dunscombe Colt, Gerald Lancaster Harding and Ralph Richmond Brown (Photographer) as well as several experienced Egyptian and Palestinian workers, all decided to join him.. Even the Petries' cook, Mohammed Kreti came away with them, even though he had worked with them since a boy (see photo 'Life in Camp'). Charles Hamilton Inge, William Boyd Kennedy Shaw (Surveyor), and Herbert Hastings McWilliams (Architect/Artist) made up the team in the first season. In the 1933-34 season Harry William Pummell joined the permanent staff as Maintenance Officer. I think he may have been the only other member of the team to have a wife and family but they remained in England. In 1934-35 Miss Eleanor Dyott joined the staff as Domestic Assistant and love blossomed for her and Shaw as they married in 1936 and Bill took a job at the Department of Antiquities in Jerusalem. Their first child, a son, was born in Palestine. He was replaced as Architect/Surveyor by Mr. G.I. Goulden, who had only stayed one season, though he had been unlucky health-wise during that time, and he was replaced by Bonney van Dyke Holbrook (Marston's stepson). Richmond Brown left in 1937 for Jordan and replaced as Photographer in the final season by Miss M. Veronica Setton Williams.

A few others joined the team each year, archaeologists or interested in archaeology, who helped with fieldwork and other tasks. Each season these extra personnel changed and stayed for varying lengths of time – there were 16 additional people in all over the six years: Dr. Immanuel Ben-Dor, Donald Brown, Miss Joan W. Crowfoot, Miss Nina Cumming, Mr. R.M. Cox, Gerald Brosseau Gardiner, Mr. and Mrs. E.F. Warren Hastings, Dr. James Spedding Kirkman, Alkin Lewis, Miss L. McNair Scott, Miss Barbara Hastings Parker, John Richmond, Dr. Aage Schmidt, Mr. N. Shiah (Xia Nia), and Lewis J. Upton Way. Some of them went on to have extraordinary and fascinating careers. There were other personnel in Jerusalem at the Government of Palestine Department of Antiquities, the Palestine Museum, Photographers, University experts etc. And of course Mrs. Starkey – Madge - and their two children, John and Mary, came too; with the addition of Jane in the 1935-1936 season.

The Dig also had a constant stream of Visitors and some would stay a few days and help on the site in various ways and Harding said in his Radio broadcast tribute *'to all who came he gave of the best of his experience'*. Immanuel Ben-Dor* said *'I had the fortune to be the guest of Mr. Starkey for some weeks and will never forget the days of work under his masterly guidance, and the evenings spent in discussion which were dominated by his brilliant spirit'*. Muriel Bentwich,* Tel Aviv said *'just the few weeks that I stayed in camp with him gave me such a strong impression of a man full of humour, bonhomie and cleverness'*.

There was also a retained site staff including the cook, nannies for the children, the permanent houseboy Diab Archam (who only had one hand, and who, by all accounts, was quite a character), Sadiq Abden a permanent personal aide to the Starkeys and children, and other domestic assistants recruited from the locals.



View across the Shephelah from Tell ed-Duweir
(I believe this may be Hasan Awad¹)
Photo: Family archive, W.Slaninka

The first year the camp consisted of just one building and some tents but year on year the site expanded into a major construction (see photo in article 'Life in Camp'). Many of the people who came and went

¹ Please see my article Part 2 (iv)

over the years to form part of the team supervising fieldwork and other tasks, also contributed to the comprehensive set of Lachish Books eventually published covering the excavation work. A vast cast of people were enlisted in this undertaking – at least 110 are listed as contributors in the Books!, with another 18 or so people and organisations thanked for aiding and facilitating the whole production in England.

Starkey's workers consisted of men, women and children from the local Bedouin tribes (mainly Ammarin, Ajjuly from the Beersheba district) who came and camped outside Lachish each season, and locals from nearby villages, principally the village Qubeibeh which fringed the Tell.



One of Olga's photos of some of the principal Workers, including a few named below

Photo: courtesy of Palestine Exploration Fund

The workforce also included a nucleus of trained Bedu from Gaza, including Salim Muhammed, Hasan Awad El Quatshan (*please see my next article Part (iv)*), Abd El-Kayrm es-Salaameh, and the three brothers Salman, Suleyman and Abdulla Aly, as well as some Egyptian retainers from Quft, including Sultan Bakhyt (Foreman) who lived on site with his wife and children. These Egyptian staff, and Diab, also doubled up as a permanent guard out of season.



Salman Aly

(he would accompany Olga when she went horseriding – Olga Letters, PEF)

Photo: Family archive. W.Slaninka

From 1935 onwards, owing to some raids out of season, Starkey also employed additional armed guards provided by the Palestinian government.

In fact it has come to light more recently that when excavations began there was resistance from the local village Qubeibeh as they had been farming the slopes and surface of Lachish, their fields divided into individual plots. There was endless wrangling and disagreement over the ownership, sale and use of the land and eventually the British Mandate expropriated the site. Starkey always took great pains to improve the land he had finished with before returning it to the villagers, even creating fertile terraces on the slopes. Marston wrote for the Times *'By using the stones and soil that had been excavated, he had surrounded the mound with a series of terraces in which the locals were growing tomatoes ... it was a little oasis!*'. Until the Government stepped in Starkey did not have permission to work the entire surface and this was another reason he spent the first two seasons mainly working on the outskirts and slopes of the Tell.

Despite this frustrating set-back however, Starkey, always recognisable in his big Boy Scout hat and staff, was beloved by his workmen as *'he had the faculty of making permanent friendships wherever he went, whether with his own countrymen or with Arabs, for his character was one of frankness and transparent sincerity'* (Olga Tufnell, obituary). She also wrote: *'It was his single-mindedness and direct purpose which endeared him greatly to his Arab workers. They all feared him and without a certain element of fear there is not admiration in the Arab mind but they could laugh at and with him as he laughed at and with them, and with laughter there is love'*. H. Bowman* said *'it was a special pleasure to one like myself, who had worked with Arabs for so many years, in 4 or 5 different countries, to see the way in which he was loved by his workers – they understood him and trusted him'*.



**He looks very purposeful here –
amid a rather strange arrangement of stones**

Photo: Family archive. W.Slaninka

It seems he was an exacting task-master and allowed no carelessness and kept everyone, team and workers, up to the mark most firmly. Charles Inge* said of him *'Starks was a difficult man to work for but he had a genius and a power which is rare nowadays and probably always was'*. However Olga also

wrote in a letter to her mother: *'Starkey is a splendid person to work under'* and in her letters home referred to him as 'Starks'. Although the men were very good workers and reliable, Starkey frequently did the rounds. 'Starkey's Law' was anyone caught striking another would be turfed off the site and the weapon confiscated. In Harding's film clips there are glimpses of him here and there lending a hand with the task in hand, or issuing instructions pointing with his staff! So keen was he to get on with the dig that at one stage he even introduced nightshifts – much to the disgruntlement of his team – but this was abandoned when one of them contracted pneumonia working in the underground tunnels at Lachish – which even he took part in!



Starkey on a rock, centre stage, instructing his troops – he spoke fluent Arabic

Photo: Wellcome-Marston Expedition Archive, Dept of Middle East, British Museum, copyright UCL Institute of Archaeology, courtesy of the Wellcome Trust and the British Museum

There are many photos of Starkey's workers, at work and at play, and he was much loved by them – in fact many referred to him as Mudin or Father. A visitor to the site, Mrs. Steuart Erskine, published in *The Times* of her time at Lachish and particularly how devoted the workers were to him. Whilst there she accompanied Starkey who had been invited to the workers tents to celebrate the birth of a baby. She commented how at ease he was with them squatted in the middle of the Bedawin tent, conversing easily in their language while they were served coffee and a primitive sword dance was mimed in the moonlight for their entertainment. She had been impressed by the detail in which Starkey explained to her the process of excavation, pointing out that even the tiniest insignificant detail could be a clue to something else more important. He was never too busy to talk of the wonders of digging up history and his cordial hospitality, she said, would remain with her. Petrie said in his obituary *'Starkey had a great flair for the importance and interpretation off things and understood the public importance of discoveries, and knew how to cultivate fresh interest'*. Pere Vincent also said in his obituary that he was *'possessed of unlimited patience and enthusiasm'*.

It is evident that Starkey was a benefactor as well as an archaeologist and this is amply proved in reports about him, and as shown in his labours at Gaza with the irrigation work he completed to help the locals farm again. He set up a field and eye hospital on site which Olga ran for the workers and their families, and their animals!, M. Frankfort* said *'he radiated friendliness in so genuine a manner that even when one had no occasion to put his kindness to the test one knew that there was someone to go to in case of difficulties'*.

Lachish Camp Chorus

Not for the greed of Gold,
Not for the hope of Fame,
Not for a lasting heritage,
Nor for a far-flung name.
Rather for making history,
And some lore of Old,
This is our aim and object,
Not for the greed of Gold.

Although Harding wrote ditties at the various camps under Petrie, it is believed that this was written by Starkey. It would seem that despite these words Starkey did achieve Fame, a far-flung name and certainly made History!.

CONTINUED IN PART 2 (iii)

Sources/Further Reading/Research: *in addition to those given in Part 2 (i)*

Further references will also be given at the end of the next Parts 2 (iii) - (v)

Please note that the References listing given in all five parts is relevant to all.

*Extracts from condolence letters sent to Madge Starkey

Gerald Lankaster Harding, Radio broadcast for Palestine Broadcasting Service, 9.25pm, 11th January 1938 (family archive) – can be viewed in Welcome Trust archives

Sir Charles Marston, 'The Bible Comes Alive', Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1937

Sir Charles Marston, 'Mr. J.L. Starkey, Work on the Bible City of Lachish', The Times, 11th January 1938

Prof. F. Petrie, obituary 'The career of John L. Starkey', Palestine Post, 12th January 1938

James Starkey, PEQ. October 1933, Exhibition and Lecture, pp 169-170, 190-199

James Starkey, PEQ, June 1934, Exhibition and Lecture 'Excavations at Tel el Duweir, 1933-1934', pp 164-175

James Starkey, MAN, July 1934, 'Excavations at Tel Duweir, Palestine 1933-1934' 129 pp 107-109

J.L. Starkey, Ancient Inscriptions from Biblical Lachish, Military Despatches and an Alphabetic Script of 1260 BC, London Illustrated News, pp 240-241, 10 August 1935

Mrs. Steuart Erskine, The Times, 'A visit to the Camp at Lachish', 18th January 1938

Olga Tufnell, PEQ, April 1938, obituary 'An Appreciation'

Pere L.H. Vincent, French Archaeological School, published obituary (in French), Palestine Oriental Society, 'To the memory of J.L. Starkey', 12th January 1938, (also in family archive)

Plus numerous newspaper articles of the day (mostly from originals in family archive)

Much information on camp life throughout these articles has been gleaned from Olga's letters home to her mother (archived at the PEF) and these are soon to be published in a book entitled 'Olga Tufnell's 'Perfect Journey' Letters and Photographs of an archaeologist in the Levant and Mediterranean', edited John Green and Ros Henry, UCL Press, expected April 2021.

Permission has been obtained from the various journals, newspapers and publishers where relevant – many of the original publications of the above are also in the family archives.