

James Leslie Starkey Archaeologist PART 2 (v) Lachish

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

This is my ninth article for Filming Antiquity directly following on from previous articles 'Part 2, Lachish (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv). It also links in with earlier articles '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.

**Please note this article contains images of human remains.*

“When a thing is old, broken and useless, we throw it on the dust-heap, but when it is sufficiently old, sufficiently broken and sufficiently useless, we give money for it, put it into a museum, and read papers over it which people come long distances to hear”. (Samuel Butler 'Note-books')



**Starkey and Olga with the top half of the Lachish Ewer, its inscription on the wall behind,
and a bronze age censor and lid**
Photo: Family archive. W.Slaninka

At the end of each season there was an official division of finds between the Department of Antiquities of Palestine and the Excavators. The objects chosen each year by the Department remained in Jerusalem and lists of these objects, along with their Museum numbers, were subsequently published as appendices in Lachish Books II, III and IV. Those items now form part of the pre-1948 collection in the Rockefeller Museum. In the first season Colt was included in this distribution. He took his share back home to the United States and a proportion is housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Jewish Museum in New York.



One of the Lachish Display cabinets in the exhibition gallery at the Wellcome Buildings
[see the necklace top right at end of this article]
 Photograph: courtesy of the Wellcome Trust

The British allocation was shipped to London and housed initially in a large exhibition gallery at The Wellcome Research Institute, Euston Road, where the expedition had its base. Each year's findings were put on public exhibition, free of charge, and Starkey regularly gave lectures and made presentations, taking an active part in the organisation of the displays and was particularly concerned that they looked attractive to the public. For the first two seasons the exhibitions were held at the premises of the Palestine Exploration Fund, before moving back to the Wellcome Institute. All of Starkey's lectures, whether held at the Wellcome Institute or at the PEF, were published in the Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterlies.



(poster family archive)

It was characteristic of Starkey's generous nature that his results were always at the disposal of those who wanted information for publication or research, and according to the Manchester Guardian *'he loved to show visitors the treasure-trove and to make the bits of pottery or ornaments live for them – he had an infectious enthusiasm and inexhaustible patience and persistence'*. He considered that it was his place as a field archaeologist to provide fresh material for interpretation by specialists; he served them ungrudgingly, not only in this way but by creating and stimulating interest among the general public for matters which were often very technical, and so that their results received full recognition. His power, thought and energy were so wholly in the service of his profession that he could not fail to impress others with his enthusiasm. The PEF published in its Quarterly Statement, News and Notes, April 1938, *'Those who have visited the exhibitions at the Palestine Exploration Fund and the Wellcome Museum will retain a vivid memory of the Director's boundless energy and enthusiasm'*.



Exhibition at Palestine Exploration Fund headquarters – 1934

Photo: courtesy Palestine Exploration Fund

An example of this tiny detail which fascinated Starkey is given in a report made by a reporter from The Daily Independent at the exhibition in July 1937. He was shown a piece of pottery by Starkey who explained that a piece of pottery can tell a lot about the times, saying *'You will see that this has been mended with great care in several places. The people who owned it mended it as carefully as an archaeologist would do if he had unearthed it thousands of years afterwards. Does that not suggest it was used in a time of depression? If times had been good they would have thrown it away and got a new one – similarly if we find numbers of gold and silver articles in common use, we are entitled to deduce that the times were good. Of course these things have to be confirmed in other ways, but they do furnish valuable evidence'*. Harding said *'as a man what impressed me most was his farsightedness and ability to see every possible side to a question. His patience was phenomenal and he was his very best when dealing with a problem which others found extremely dull. He had the power of presenting his results to others in a way which fired imagination and enthusiasm'*. Olga had also referred to his *'phenomenal intuition'* in her *'Reminiscences of a Petrie Pup'*.

After Sir Henry's death in 1936, Starkey had to find new premises in London and he approached Sir Mortimer Wheeler, Director of the newly created Institute of Archaeology, University of London. Wheeler agreed and the Institute, first in Regents Park and later in Gordon Square, became the home of the Wellcome-Marston expedition. Starkey's sister, Olive, worked for the Institute of Archaeology (see my Olive Starkey article) and she painstakingly restored many of the broken vessels that were sent back to the UK.

Out of season Starkey would work on his notes, lectures and publishings, and Pummell, who happened to live not far away from Starkey's home at Walton on Thames, would drive him to his office at the Institute as he had done to the Wellcome office (Starkey couldn't drive). Later, when Starkey moved to St. Margaret's he continued in this role. He would also drive him to lectures which he gave regularly to members and others at the Palestine Exploration Fund at their premises in Hinde Street, London, and to the public exhibitions of the Lachish findings and also offered free lectures and slide shows to the residents in Walton on Thames if enough got together!.

In 1937 Starkey was elected on to the Executive Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund. He was also elected as a member of the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Anthropological Institute, and the Royal Geographical Society and belonged to the Masons. So he lectured to these and other groups and societies too, including the Ethnic Study Group of Westminster, usually accompanied by a lantern slide show. In season he also lectured in Jerusalem, including the Palestine Oriental Society and The Antiquity Society. As the excavations progressed he would show the Lachish films made by Richmond Brown, specifically 'Lachish – City of Judah' showing excavations in process. He also published regularly in other publications such as MAN and The London Illustrated News, and the LIN issues were packed with information and pictorial evidence, usually comprising three full A3 size pages.



This stand looks rather gruesome – perhaps they should have been left to rest where they were?

Photo: Family archive. W.Slaninka

About 700 skulls were sent back to the UK (it had been Madge's unfortunate job to clean, wax and bandage them!) However, further to my sentiment in the caption, one of the skulls that had been trepanned was placed in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem and did, unwittingly, manage to secure itself a peaceful ending. Apparently it was loaned to the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Jaffa for research, but after pressure from religious groups at the time human remains were removed from there and buried – the Lachish skull included! (Ussishkin, Biblical Lachish)

At the June 1937 Annual General Meeting, Sir Robert Mond (Chairman of PEF) introduced Starkey's lecture on 'Lachish as Illustrating Bible History' with the following speech:

'We are going to listen this afternoon to an account by Mr. Starkey of the last campaign he has been carrying out on the site of ancient Lachish. I have visited that site and I am sorry for all of those who have not also had the opportunity of visiting it. It is one of the most magnificent sites I know. A flat table-top on a rather high hill in a beautiful landscape. Below the crest of the hill there is a complete line showing where the ancient walls ran; on top of the hill there are the remains of the ancient palace and the temples and the ancient town. It is as beautiful a site as one could possibly wish to work on. As in the case of all important sites in Palestine which have been occupied for many years, there are successive layers of buildings, successive occupations, successive towns of different periods which all need carefully examining, layer by layer, in order that we may discover the history and evolution of those towns.'

Starkey's daughter Mary remembers going to some of his presentations parading as a young Palestinian girl to add a touch of authenticity to the occasion and her costume is now in the Palestinian Heritage Museum in Jerusalem, along with many costumes, outfits, jewellery and textiles which Madge collected over the years in Palestine.

In 1936, by special invitation from Buckingham Palace, Starkey received a King George V silver jubilee medal which had an accompanying Certificate.

Many of the findings, articles, photos and information from the expedition can be found in the British Museum, The Institute of Archaeology - the University of London, and in the Palestinian Exploration Fund, including comprehensive early cine film footage of the excavations in progress at Lachish (by Richmond Brown) which has now been converted to vhs and dvd. On this film Starkey can be seen packing away finds to be sent back to Britain and Starkey's young son John and daughter Mary make a brief debut! More recently the UCL have now digitised some of Harding's pathe baby reels and hence this article now being on their website! There is even more footage of the Starkey family to be seen on these. Items from Lachish are also scattered in departments and museums throughout Britain and the World.



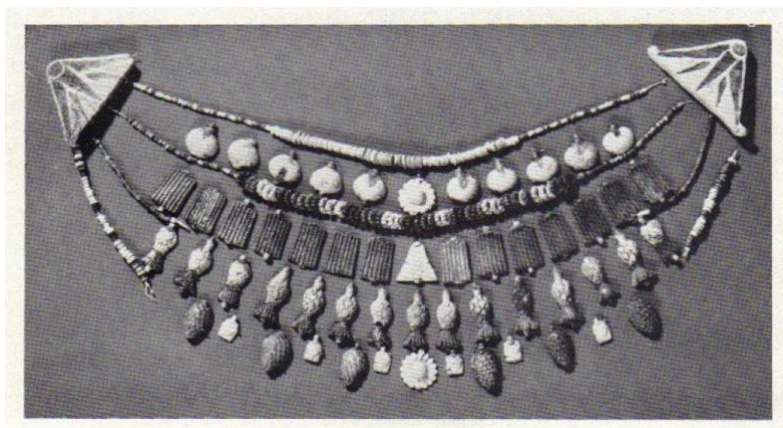
The British Museum – part of the Levant Gallery 57

(why not take a virtual tour of the Gallery!)

Photo: W.Slaninka – permission of the British Museum

The British Museum, particularly, has a gallery showcasing Starkey's work on Lachish in its Levant section (Gallery 57), its collection showing some of the 17,000 objects excavated, many of which came from the richly furnished burial tombs. The remainder are in the possession of Jerusalem's Rockefeller Museum and Israel Museum and the exhibition is remarkable there not only in the objects they display, but for Starkey's pictorial record of their finding, and of scenes showing how the excavating team lived in his complete excavation records, including plans, photographs and field notebooks. Despite my only ever finding praise of Starkey's methods of record-keeping, I have seen some recent criticism of them compared to modern day methods and practices. Everything I have read about him show him to be very conscientious and punctilious, and I feel sure that whatever he did was the norm at the time, if not exceeding it!

It would be impossible to list all the wonderful and beautiful finds from Lachish here, though there was definitely a plethora of pots!



Faience flower motif necklace c.1350 BC – see display cabinet at head of article

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
(original photo also in family archive)

TO BE CONTINUED

WITH FURTHER ARTICLES ON WELLCOME GEOLOGY PROJECT IN BETHLEHEM,
THE TRAGEDY, AND AFTERMATH

Sources/Further Reading/Research: *in addition to those given in Parts (i) – (iv)*
Please note that the References listing given in all five parts is relevant to all.

Samuel Butler, 'The Note-books of Samuel Butler', 1912

Daily Independent, 'How Bible story is being confirmed', 19th July 1937

Harold J. Shepstone, 'Uncovering a Bible City', Sunday Circle, 3rd October 1937

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

Pamela Magrill, A researcher's guide to the Lachish Collection in the British Museum, British Museum Research Publications, 2006

Manchester Guardian, 'Mr. J.L. Starkey, killed by Arabs', 14th January, 1938

Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly, News and Notes, April 1938

Jonathan Tubb, Lachish from Bronze Age, to Bible, to BM, pp.18-25, British Museum Society Bulletin, 42, 1983

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

Olga Tufnell, 'Reminiscences of a Petrie Pup', PEQ Issue 2 1982, ps.81-86

Olga Tufnell, 'Reminiscences of Excavations at Lachish', an address delivered at Lachish on July 6, 1983, Tel Aviv – Journal of Tel Aviv University, Institute of Archaeology, Vol.12, November 1, 1985

David Ussishkin, Excavations and Restoration Work at Tel Lachish 1985-1994, Third Preliminary Report, Tel Aviv Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University, Volume 23, No.1, 1996

David Ussishkin, 'Biblical Lachish', Israel Exploration Society/Biblical Archaeology Society

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 archive.