

James Leslie Starkey
Archaeologist
PART 5

**Lachish – the remaining 1938 season – and beyond,
Family Epilogue and Conclusion**

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

This is my fifteenth and final article for *Filming Antiquity* directly following on from previous articles Part 4 (i)(a) and (b) 'Tragedy in Palestine 10th January 1938', Part 4 (ii) 'Funeral and Burial, Mount Zion, Jerusalem' and Part 4 (iii) 'Memorial Service Westminster' and links in with earlier articles Part 3 'Bethlehem Geology Project', Part 2 'Lachish (i)-(v)', 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.



Olga and Inge packing up the camp

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

After the funeral, Olga and Harding continued packing up Starkey's possessions as well as clearing out the contents of Starkey's rooms at Hotel Fast to send back to Madge - this included the damask and games left in the car that fateful evening. Some things were eagerly distributed to the team, the workmen and others who wanted a memento, including the villagers from nearby Quibeibe. Olga kept Madge updated with their proceedings and in the ensuing months Madge sent out some gifts for their house-staff

and key workers and instructions to Olga for donating her and Starkey's remaining things to them.

After discussions with Wellcome and Marston, and the authorities in Palestine, it was decided that the excavations should continue at Lachish for a further three months to see out the season. This was initially under the supervision of Harding, who was given leave from his post in Transjordan. Charles Inge was his principal assistant and took over when Harding returned. Some regular police and guards were also installed in the camp for safety reasons. When Harding returned he left behind his alsation guard-dog 'Lachish', and Olga found this very comforting! (see photo in my article Life in Camp – he is actually standing on the top part of one of the Residency columns which is now standing in Tel Aviv University campus). The decision that the excavations should continue was published in several newspapers.

Inge said in his end of year lecture that the loyalty of the Arab workers meant they did not have to close down for a single day and that it was due to Starkey's genius for organisation that they were able to carry on the work as smoothly as they did. Each member of the staff and every one of the Arabs, down to the smallest basket boy, knew what their job was, and the rules they had to keep. He also said that Starkey's plans for excavation were laid so surely and so far ahead, that all the work they did that season, and whatever work may be done at Lachish in the future, seemed to be under his personal direction. He also said that he hoped Starkey's memory may be honoured in the continuance of that research.

Inge finished the season and hosted the usual exhibition and lantern lecture at the Wellcome Trust in London in July, 'New Discoveries. Lachish, Palestine'; his lecture printed in the PEF Quarterly October 1938. The Manchester Guardian (August 1938) reported that the annual exhibition of the discoveries at Lachish in Palestine was on view at the Wellcome Research Institute in 'Excavations at Lachish – This Year's Exhibition', but that it held a tragic association. The article went on to describe in some detail the exhibits, the history of Lachish and Starkey's important discoveries. Inge's further findings were also published in the press 'More Finds in Lachish – writing on fragments of Pottery'. Inge also carried on Starkey's tradition of publishing the year's findings in the Illustrated London News. His article depicted many items and was entitled 'Where a Murdered British Archaeologist had done great work – new results at Lachish since the assassination of Mr. Starkey by Arab terrorists; work in continuation of his researches on a biblical site – a fitting memorial to the discoverer of the Lachish Letters'.

Starkey would have already been working on the Annual Report and although it would have been completed by Inge, I was pleased to see that his original cover is still in existence with Starkey's handwriting on the front 'Tell Duweir 1937-1938'.

However with the continuing troubles in Palestine, and indeed Mr. Illife, of the Palestine Museum, was also himself shot and injured in the uprisings, and with World War II looming, the excavations were halted: the 1937-38 season was the last one. Since Starkey's death the Palestine authorities also said they would no longer accept responsibility for the safety of any expeditions, and similarly the Natural History Museum would not allow Miss Bate to continue on her project in Bethlehem.. It seems others heeded the gathering storm clouds ahead as the Hastings and the Shaws also sailed home from Palestine on the same boat at the end of the season. Olga laid flowers on Starkey's grave before they all departed, and Sultan Bakhyt, one of the Egyptian core staff at Lachish, and three local village labourers were left to look after the site.. Despite the guards the camp was raided at least three times.



Workers waving goodbye as they left camp

Photo: courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund

It must have all felt like the end of an era – Sir Henry dying in July 1936, Starkey in January 1938, and Sir Robert Mond later the same year in October. Sir Charles Marston published in the paper ‘Bible Search is Cursed’, Daily Express, 9th May 1939. He said *Starkey’s death was the worst thing of all*. It was also reported in the Daily Mirror ‘Evil Powers thwarting scripture discoveries’, 9th May 1938 after he had presented a paper to the Victoria Institute the day before. He himself died in May 1946.

In the years 1940–42 Harding did return to organise the final clearing and evacuation of the expedition camp and paid off the last debts owing to the local guards, and landowners (if they were responsible for Starkey’s death I hope they felt some remorse).. More destruction of the site took place in the 1948 War of Independence. The village of Quibebe was levelled by Israeli military in the 1960s and the stones of the village, many from the ruins of Lachish, were sold to building contractors. These days the immediate vicinity of Lachish is farmed and covered with vineyards growing grapes for export, including Sainsbury and Marks & Spencer!. The area is also now part of the Israel national park – Israel Nature and Parks Authority – planted with pine trees and has been so now for about 20 years.

In 1953, Olga wrote in Lachish III The Iron Age (page 32), *“the grove, the garden and the house did not long survive the closure of the camp. The local guards left in charge were powerless to withstand attack from a marauding band and the buildings were burnt in a second raid. The railway equipment was sold at the time of Rommel’s advance to Egypt and the villagers cleared all that was left of the stores and equipment”*. You can see some of the trees that were planted round the camp, including almond, cypress, spruce, eucalyptus and fir in the photo above, and Olga’s garden in the courtyard consisted of mimosa, night-scented stock, anemones, narcissi and daisies – to name but a few. There is a shot of her in the courtyard working on her illustrations of scarabs in Harding’s

clips for Filming Antiquity. The lone Lote tree – the jujube or Christ Thorn tree - however can still be seen today on top of the far edge of the mound near the caanaanite well. Olga had commented that the villagers would not pass it after dark!. There is a lone tree featured in Harding's clips and I wonder if it is that tree?.

Olga took on the responsibility for almost single-handedly publishing and archiving their work at Lachish for Lachish II (The Fosse Temple), Lachish III (The Iron Age) in two volumes and Lachish IV (The Bronze Age) in two volumes, the first appearing in 1940 – the last in 1958. Every single item is meticulously catalogued with photographs and/or fine drawings under their descriptive heading, and explanations of the excavations of the buildings, palaces, residences, homes, temples, workshops, altars and cemeteries with many quotes from the field notes and Starkey's observations.

I particularly like Olga's dedication to Starkey in Book II which states: *'This volume records only a small part of 5 years work begun by Mr. Starkey as Director of the Wellcome-Marston expedition. Tell ed Duweir had already revealed much to his observant mind when his tragic death on a lonely road near Hebron deprived the world of a brilliant archaeologist and the expedition of a beloved man and trusted leader. Though the preparation of this account has been in other hands, the inspiration and the results remain his own'*.

She and Olive, Starkey's sister, quietly worked away on the Lachish findings at Regent's Park – fitted in-between their A.R.P. work! as reported in The Evening Standard (24th June 1940) - 'Palestine Excavation Goes on – Two women direct it from London'. In Lachish II, III and IV, Olga always thanked Olive for her work in repairing and reconstructing the several hundred pots and decorated vessels from Lachish that formed the collection. The Books have now become, I believe, one of the most widely consulted sources for all subsequent work in Palestinian archaeology, and totals sum 1,400 pages. In fact Starkey's Lachish Letters I sparked a lot of interest amongst the archaeological experts of the day, and since, and in Lachish III Olga listed all the serious writings that had been produced on the subject at that time in 1950, - 58 – I wonder how many there are now?!

Also in the 1940s, while she was employed by the Wellcome Trustees to oversee the preparation of the Lachish excavation report, Olga began to receive occasional requests from various sources for objects, and duplicate items were given to school museums. By mid 1951 there was a real possibility that the expedition might have to give up its rooms at the Institute of Archaeology and as a result duplicate items were distributed to universities all over the world, with the bulk to the British Museum London. Some of these donations are on record but the published lists are incomplete. At the same time the collection of physical anthropology specimens, human crania and animal bones were donated to the British Museum (Natural History), now known as the Natural History Museum. In the 1980s the Wellcome Trust further distributed material to a number of museums in Britain.

In 1950 Olga herself gave a lecture on Lachish 'Excavations at Tell ed Duweir, Palestine, directed by the Late J.L. Starkey, 1932-1938 – Some results and reflections', published in the PEQ as well as another paper on Lachish she co-wrote with BS.J. Isserlin – in the same edition. In 1965 (October to November) the Palestine Exploration Fund, in conjunction with the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem put on a Centenary Exhibition – World of the Bible. It was managed mainly by Olga Tuffnell, and was held in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The catalogue published a description of a Bedouin Woman's costume, submitted by Jane (Starkey's youngest daughter). There

were also many chapters where reference was made to Lachish, as well as featuring some of the items on display. I also have a Cambridge News clipping originally from 1959 where she attended a conference at the newly-opened Alphabet Museum, Cambridge, organised by David Diringer who collaborated with Olga on the Lachish Books. The accompanying photograph showing all the academics arriving, mostly men, features Olga – almost centre-stage! It was reprinted in 2012 with a question from the Paper asking if anyone knew what happened to the Museum?

It wasn't until 1966 that work resumed on Lachish itself when Prof. Yohanan Aharoni of Tel Aviv University excavated the Solar Shrine from 1966 to 1968, but David Ussishkin, The University of Tel Aviv Institute of Archaeology, in particular, was very involved in continuing what Starkey had started, reopening the dig in 1973. A bit like Starkey's road to archaeology, he too as a boy was struck by Starkey's work, and in 2004 on the publication of his latest book on the subject 'The renewed archaeological excavations at Lachish' he said *'I remembered Tel Lachish very well from the days of my compulsory army service in the 1950s, when we regularly roamed the area in our manoeuvres, and from all I had learned since my boyhood about the biblical city, the Lachish letters, and the murder of Lachish's previous excavator, J.L. Starkey. I could still see in my mind's eye a picture of the ostraca in the Rockefeller Museum, which I visited with my father as a young boy before the 1948 war'*. Ussishkin dedicated his volumes to three women, including Olga, whose work on the Lachish Books became the basis and guideline for his renewed excavations. She was an enthusiastic supporter of his project and lent the new expedition and its team her full support. Ussishkin cites Starkey's work throughout his 'Excavations at Tel Lachish, 1973-1977 – Preliminary Report', in an earlier report in 'Royal Ontario Museum – Archaeological Newsletter', and also later in the main Book above. The more they dug the more they were impressed by the sound job done by Starkey, though he was not perfect! – see my earlier articles Part 2 Lachish. Ussishkin toured Britain in 1982 lecturing on his continuing excavations of Lachish, particularly in London at the Palestine Exploration Fund and the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society, and at the University of Cambridge, which my parents attended. In 1977 it was hoped that the site would become an archaeological laboratory and model showpiece. He worked the site until 1994.

In July 1983 the British Museum launched a special four month exhibition to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the beginnings of Lachish. Prof. Jonathan Tubb, Curator of the Levant, spent more than 18 months sifting through the material after it had been acquired by them from the basements of the Institute of Archaeology and was reported in The Sunday Times as saying *'We have a multitude of pottery, metalwork, jewellery, scarabs, toilet articles and relics from more than 200 tombs. It is a most important collection'*. Another paper report was entitled 'Lachish Finds for British Museum'. To complement the exhibition Olga gave two lectures, the first after spending a week there in July at its opening, and the second when it closed in October, after her trip to Israel. The collection, which included 15,000 individual items, and 3,000 photographs including site records, excavation photos and other archive material, is now displayed in its own dedicated gallery (57) at the British Museum¹ and Pamela Magrill² has published 'A researcher's guide to the Lachish collection in the British Museum' which is a very comprehensive publication listing and describing the entire collection and where each item was found on the Tell. See my photo of the Gallery in Part 2 Lachish (v).

¹ Letters 1, 2, 5, 7-18, 20 and 21 are in the British Museum, the remainder are in Jerusalem.

² Pamela did her Phd doctorate on Lachish!

Also in 1983, the University of Tel Aviv, to commemorate the beginnings of Lachish and also the tenth anniversary of the renewed work under Ussishkin, paid for Olga, now an old lady of 78, to revisit Lachish, and speaking from Jerusalem she said *'it was a wonderful experience going back; very moving. I felt so grateful to have survived so many years to tell the tale'*, 'Olga Tufnell/s Quiet Revolution', Sunday Times, 10th July. She also commented *'But his (Ussishkin's) work will not, as Starkey in his turn could not, reveal the whole history of Lachish. At the base of the mound there is no doubt that there is material going back as early as that from the lowest levels of Jericho – it will take many generations to get to the bottom'*, 'A Golden Return to Palestine', Hampstead and Highgate Express. The anniversary culminated with a farewell party in a eucalyptus grove beside the Mound with a keynote speech from Olga, with well over 200 archaeologists and others in attendance. Her Address was published in a Journal from Tel Aviv University. She wrote to Mary and said *'it was a marvellous week'*. In 1984 Olga published her life's work on Scarabs, a monumental classification, many of which she had gathered in the excavatory work she had undertaken firstly under Petrie, and then under Starkey. She died on 11th April 1985, shortly after her long awaited book was published *'the highlight of my year'* (letter to Mary) – and sadly before she knew that she had been nominated to receive an award for her life's work. Harding passed away on 11th February 1979, having become famous too in his own right for the discovery of The Dead Sea Scrolls..



John centre, son Leslie to his right, son Paul to his left
[Note all the mature trees compared to 50 years before]

Fifty years after his death a memorial service was held for Starkey in Jerusalem, to the day on 11th January 1988, and at the same time 2.30pm, attended by his son John, and grandsons Leslie and Paul (who travelled from Canada). A picture and article of the occasion was published in the local press, including 'Son of Slain Archaeologist returns to find stones still being thrown in Gaza', The Jerusalem Post, 11th January.. This had been organised by the Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University and in cooperation with The British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem and The American Institute of Holy Land Studies, and attended by the Mayor of Jerusalem - Teddy Kollek, The British Ambassador to Israel – William Squire, Prof. Benjamin Mazar – the noted Israeli archaeologist, Prof. Nachman Avigad, Prof. David Ussishkin and many others. The Service was performed by Rev. Alfred Sawyer, and a reception was held afterwards hosted by Morris A. Inch, Executive Director, at the American Institute on Mount Zion with speeches given by those mentioned above as well as John Starkey. He spoke of some of his recollections of living at Lachish, and of his father, and of visiting musical troupes coming to the camp when his sister Mary danced to the music round the camp fire. His very final memory was when they left to return at the end of the family's final season there and their car being stoned as they drove through Gaza. It was a memorable event, well attended by members of the archaeological and Christian communities in Jerusalem. It wasn't until the ceremony that John Starkey recognised William Squire as his old school chum from the Masonic School for Boys! (they still keep in touch today).

John also presented Ussishkin with the Lachish Banner of the British Expedition, depicting the Lachish logo, embroidered by Starkey's sister Olive, and which had resided with him at home for the last fifty years – see my article 'Olive Starkey – lady of Lachish'.

In March 2007, an exhibition was organised by the Institute of Archaeology in London, on Sir Flinders Petrie and his work in Palestine – 'A Future for the Past'. This naturally included many finds by Starkey and included a continuous showing of the cine film of Lachish to give a flavour of excavatory work and life on digs in those days. It was soon after this event that I felt inspired to investigate further into my Grandfather's archaeological career and what a wealth of stuff I have found!

In 2009 The Egypt Exploration Society in London informed me that they also planned to include Starkey in their next edition of the *Who's Who in Egyptology*.

In 2010 BBC Radio 4 broadcast a series of talks entitled 'The History of the World in 100 objects', and I was pleased to see that Lachish featured – or rather the Lachish Reliefs - narrated by Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum. This talk can be listened to on the British Museum website.

On 30th September 2010, Starkey's son John flew over from Canada and lectured for the Palestine Exploration Fund's 150th anniversary at the British Museum in London about the life and career of his father, which was very well received. I had put up a display of the family archives to accompany John's talk and the after lecture wine and nibbles was practically 'buzzing' and lasted over an hour – an unprecedented event apparently!. On 11th June 2015 he was invited back for a repeat lecture which was partially financed by the Wellcome Trust. How uncanny that John should be standing virtually in his father's footsteps in the British Museum talking about him and his work, and the occasion funded by the Wellcome Trust too!

In 2013 Prof. Josef Garfinkel, Hebrew University of Jerusalem started excavating the site again and this work is still ongoing. He also toured England giving lectures such as

'Why do we need a fourth expedition to Lachish', held at King's College, London on 4th February 2015, organised by the Palestine Exploration Fund. At that time he also visited me and Mother in Cambridge to look through our archive. He was in England researching at the Wellcome Trust for his article on Starkey's Murder and forthcoming book when John gave his talk – so was there too. Last year he gave a Zoom lecture from Jerusalem organised by the Anglo-Israeli Archaeological Society on 26th May, about Starkey's murder and I joined in with the audience participation whilst in lockdown at home. His forthcoming book 'Biography of the First Expedition to Lachish – Colonial Archaeology in Palestine in the 1930s', is due I believe next year. Some other excavation work occurred concurrently, in 2016 with a team from Korea, and in 2017 an Austro/Israeli group.

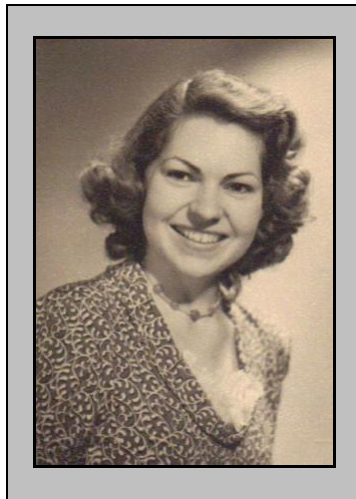
Of course there has been is a plethora of other writings, lectures, publications and allied connections over the last 83 years but the above are just some I know about .but it seems Starkey's work continues to hold the interest of the public and those in his field. The internet is crammed with sites about Starkey, Lachish, the Lachish reliefs and the siege of Lachish. I even found a rap song in the charts about the Siege of Lachish! There's also a painting of the sacking of Lachish based on the reliefs from Ninevah by Elayne La Porta 'Battle of Lachish' – available to order from her Fine Arts Gallery, Nevada – see my Part 2 Lachish (i). Even Mary and Jane's Masonic School at Rickmansworth mentions him and both of them on its Archaeological page.

Brief Family Epilogue

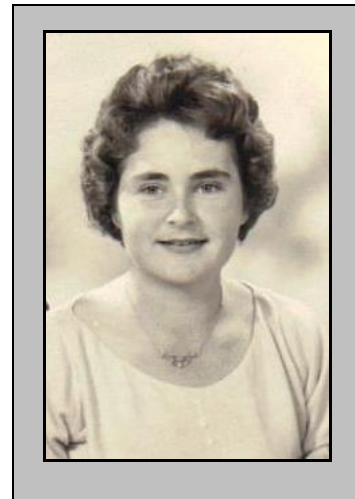
Madge died in 1952 (tragically from cancer in her 50s) and so she and Starkey never saw their six grandchildren and great grandson – and conversely the children their grandparents. - Mary was only 21 and Jane just 18 – tender ages to have lost both parents. The house at Redway Drive was packed up and sold soon after her death, and Olga came and removed many antiques and objects of value.



John



Mary



Jane

John emigrated to Canada in 1956 and became a businessman in Finance and where he married Peggy Courtney (originally from Ireland) and had two sons, Leslie (married) and Paul, and a grandson Paul, from Leslie. Mary married George Plummer in 1952, an Army Bandmaster, who was soon posted abroad, and also had two children Wendy (myself) and David. Jane married Jack Langhorn (Shoe Shop Manager, Elliots and Russell & Bromley) and moved to Surrey where they had two children, Michael and

Susan. Michael is married and has an adopted son Daniel, Wendy is widowed (no children) and Susan, David and the two Pauls never married, or had children. So the family line stops with this generation it seems. Sadly, Peggy, George, Mary, Jack and Jane have now all passed (Jane tragically from cancer in her 50s like Madge) – Mary only quite recently in December 2017. However John is still very much alive though now in his 90s!. Unfortunately none of the children or grandchildren followed in Starkey's footsteps (although Mary had a lifelong interest in archaeology).

Starkey's lasting testament however lies in the four volumes of the Lachish Excavation Reports, Volumes I-IV, the Lachish Letters themselves, the display of materials in museums worldwide from both the expeditions under his leadership and those under Petrie, his own lectures and publications, the plethora of publications and reports and articles on his work, and on him, and to this day still keep appearing, and finally in the Camp Chorus which everyone sang on the dig:

***Not for the greed of gold,
Nor 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.***

Prof. William Foxwell Albright wrote *'as long as the Bible retains a hold on the hearts and minds of men, so long will the memory of James Leslie Starkey be held in respect'*.



Photo: Family Archive – photo taken by Madge

I have thoroughly enjoyed sharing the Starkey archive on the Filming Antiquity platform and would particularly like to thank Amara Thornton for giving me this opportunity, and for her forbearance throughout. There is still so much more I could have said in this series of articles, and with many more unseen photos, but sadly space dictated otherwise. Nevertheless I hope you as readers have enjoyed everything I had to say and found it of interest. I am not a scholar nor experienced in archaeology, so forgive me if there are any glaring gaffs in the articles!

I would also like to particularly thank the following people for their help and advice: Prof. Jonathan Tubb at the British Museum, Felicity Cobbing at the Palestine Exploration Fund, Prof. David Ussishkin at Tel Aviv University, Prof. Yosef Garfinkel at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Dr. John (jack) D.M.Green, ACOR, The American Centre of Research, Amman, Ros Henry, Mr. Ralph Cairns at the British Palestine Police Association, and Dr. Rachael Sparkes, University College London.

With special thanks too to my Uncle John – the last man standing of the era – for endlessly harassing him for those precious memories. And of course to my mother Mary who passed in 2017, just before I started my first article on Olive – there were so many questions I wanted to ask her and couldn't. I was so glad she was still here to see Harding's moving clips of her parents at Lachish.

Before I sign off I think I really need to thank Olga posthumously too for her herculean efforts in finishing the massive tomes of Lachish and for everything she did. She stayed loyal and dedicated to Starkey and Lachish throughout and no doubt without all her input I doubt Starkey would be as well-known as he is. It seems that whatever I write about him, Olga pops into the scenario somewhere. So, like Ussishkin in his Books on Lachish, I too would like to dedicate all these articles to Olga.

That's all Folks!

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(also contains an article by Starkey already written by him, The Lachish Ewer, p.47)

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Victoria & Albert Museum/Palestine Exploration Fund, World of the Bible, Centenary Exhibition of the Palestine Exploration Fund in cooperation with the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, 1-28 November 1965

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.