

James Leslie Starkey
Archaeologist
PART 4 (ii)
Tragedy in Palestine

Funeral and Burial, Mount Zion, Jerusalem
11th January 1938

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

This is my thirteenth article for Filming Antiquity directly following on from my previous article Part 4 (i)(a) and (b) 'Tragedy in Palestine 10th January 1938' 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.

***'I say, Fly away to Zion, Fly away Home ... one bright morning
when his work is over, man will fly away home to Mount Zion'***

(Bob Marley and The Wailers, Rastaman Chant,
copyright Bluemountain Music and Island Records)

Olga and Harding made the funeral arrangements together with Robert Hamilton, Department of Antiquities, and Olga travelled with Starkey's body in the tender. She and Harding had worked all day preparing a Tribute which Harding read out on the Palestine Broadcasting Service at 9.30pm on the evening of the funeral, although they were only allowed him 5 minutes. The final sentence was *'Many persons of all classes and professions in Palestine have lost a very dear friend and helper, but the loss to science is even greater'*. Harding's cousin Dennis Tory wrote to Madge *'my cousin constantly told me what a brilliant archaeologist he had as a mentor and guide in your husband'*. Hamilton later wrote to Madge to *'remind you of the true respect and affection in which your husband was held by every one of us who came in touch with him'*. Ernest Tatham Richmond wrote to her from Italy *'He was among the most distinguished of excavators as he was among the most loyal of men'*.



Photo courtesy of Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.
[Photographer: Zvi Orushkes]

His funeral was, in the words of Olga in a letter to Madge, *'simple but impressive'*, and he was buried in the Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion, Jerusalem, at 2.30pm on the 11th January – attended by hundreds of mourners. All expenses were borne by the Wellcome Trust.

Starkey was initially driven through Jerusalem in a cavalcade of military and police vehicles, the men standing upright around his coffin in the back of the open tender, with planes circling overhead. His coffin, draped with the Union Flag and smothered with palms and flowers, was then borne on the shoulders of British policemen, with many uniformed officials bearing wreaths in the procession, which passed along the street and through the Jaffa Gate – the streets apparently lined with a quiet crowd of well-wishers – *'so many people from all walks and creeds'* (Olga's letter to Madge).



Photo courtesy of Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.
[Photographer: Zvi Orushkes]

At the entrance to the Protestant Cemetery on Mount Zion they were met by another large group of Officials and Academics. These included His Excellency the High Commissioner, the Chief Justice Sir Harry Trusted, the Chief Secretary Mr. J.V.W. Shaw, the Attorney General Mr. F.W. Fitzgerald, the Special Commissioner, Mr. D.G. Harris, the Deputy Inspector of Police Mr. H.P. Rice and others. Led by Rev. G.F. Graham-Brown the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem (who read the burial service of the Anglican church), Archdeacon Stewart, and Dr. Hawes, the British Chaplain, they all walked the long avenue of cypresses to his final resting place at the edge of the cemetery on a steep cliff edge overlooking Mount Moab with a view towards the Dead Sea and Jericho. Mr. Iliffe later wrote to Madge describing the occasion and said *'the weather was beautiful with white January clouds scudding across the Jerusalem sky'*. I think it is amazing that in those days of little technology, and at such short notice, that so many people managed to turn out. Well-known archaeologists of all faiths mingled with scholars and students around the grave including Profs. Mayer, Torczyner and Hannequin, Dr. E.L. Sukenik, Mr. Kennedy Shaw, Dr. I Ben-Dor, Father Vincent, Lady Petrie and many others. Caterina, Miss Gardner's maid from Bethlehem was also present. Mrs. Marjorie Iliffe had arranged for Madge's wreath which was of asparagus ferns, bay and deep red roses in the shape of a heart and placed on her behalf by Mr. John Iliffe (Keeper of the Palestine Museum). He can be seen in the following photo standing next to Olga and Harding. He also said in his letter *'You have the satisfaction of knowing he has left a very great memorial of work accomplished behind him and*

that his name will live on the lips of scholars and students as long as the history of Palestine interests the world'. Dr. S. Yevin finished his published obituary with 'May the land in which you buried sweeten your eternal rest'.



**Olga, Harding and Iliffe (holding wreath) just to the right of the small tree.
Father Vincent in white on far right.
Photo: Family archive, Wendy Slaninka**

Mrs. Cumming went to the grave the next day and picked one of the rosebuds off the wreath and posted it to Madge in England, and I still have it. I hope that the sole wreath on top of his coffin in the second picture above is the one from Madge.



Scan of Rosebud from Madge's wreath for her husband

Other wreaths and flowers on the day of the funeral were received from His Excellency the High Commissioner, the Inspector General and all officers of the Palestine Police, Mr. & Mrs. P.L.O. Guy, Mr. and Mrs. F. Fast, Dr. & Mrs. Nelson Glueck, Mr. & Mrs. C.N. Johns, Mr. & Mrs. Cumming, Dr. E.J. Mackay, Barclays, Dept of Lands and Surveys, Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, Dr. & Mrs. Yevin, Mr. and Mrs. R. Hamilton, Archaeological Survey of Palestine, Mr. C. Raad, Theo Fast, Knesevich family, Lallock, Vester, Dept of Antiquities, Kennedy Shaw, Megiddo Expedition of University of Chicago, Mr. & Mrs. John H. Iliffe, Bialek Foundation of the Jewish Agency, the General Council (Vaad Leumi) of Palestine Jews, 'your friends of Hebrew University', Fisher, British School of Archaeology, the Egyptian School of Archaeology, the American School of Oriental Research, School of Oriental Studies at Hebrew University, Mr. Joseph Albina, Palestine Police, the whole camp at Tell Duweir, Mr. H.W. Pummell, the Galluk brothers (drivers for Starkey), Gerald, Madge and children. However a visit the next day showed that many more had been added totaling 50 or 60. A Mrs. Alice Knesevic, family friend, wrote from Gaza with *'trembling hand and tears flowing from my eyes'* to say that every time she visited Jerusalem she would place Starkey's favourite flowers *'the Gaza flowers'* on his grave. A year later on the anniversary of his funeral Madge arranged for a bunch of roses to be placed on his grave which was spotted by Miriam Y. Ben Gavriel (Prof. Torczyner's secretary), who had attended for the same purpose, and she wrote to Madge that very day to commiserate with her *'Believe me that this day was a sad one also for us who mourn for this noble man'*.

Even a month later when the men from Lachish returned to pay their respects after 40 days, and to plant crocus and anemone bulbs, fresh flowers seemingly were still being laid on the grave. Many of the Lachish men including Mohammed Kreti, Diab Barham, Sadiq Ahmed, Sultan Bakht and others, employed a scribe and Mr. Kirkman and sent letters home to Madge to express their condolences. Diab said *'What shall I do, I lost my Father, I am now orphan. I and my friends ask God to put him in his paradise'*. Holbrook Bonney also said *'we called Starkey 'Father' here – it was not just a title – he really occupied that position in our affection'*. Madge was also informed of much sadness at Quft, Egypt which had filtered back to the camp and Oliver Myers also conveyed this in a letter to Madge from Luxor *'the staff here wish me to express their sympathies as have also the Quftin'*. Petrie had been unable to attend Starkey's funeral owing to illness but published an obituary for him in The Palestine Post *"the brutal folly of gunmen destroying the friends of their country has never been worse shown ... now a kindly manager is added to the number'*. He was buried with a good view towards the Dead Sea and Mount Moab, where later Petrie was to join him¹. Later, his headstone was engraved *'Sacred to the Memory of a loving husband and devoted father – James Leslie Starkey, died Jan 10th 1938, aged 43 years'*. (A few years later Melissa Marston, Sir Charles' daughter, wrote to Starkey's daughter Mary to say she had visited the grave and was arranging for it to be tidied up and relettered).

The visit of the High Commissioner and other guests to the new Palestine Archaeological Museum which had been arranged for the 11th before the formal opening and when Starkey would have given his speech, was cancelled as a mark of respect. It was opened on the 13th without ceremony - an article entitled 'Palestine Treasures' about the clouded opening of the museum was published in The Times that day. Members of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mount Scopus, and the Antiquities Department, also attended a special tribute and Memorial Service held at 2.30pm on the 12th January. Speakers included Profs. Torczyner and Mayer, and Dr. Sukenik. Prof. Torczyner voiced the things he had *'hoped to say to Starkey personally on the happy day when our Book (Lachish Letters) reached Jerusalem'*. Dr. Sukenik said in a letter to Madge *'The catastrophe is so great that it is not possible at present to estimate the loss - Mr. Starkey will always live in the memory of all those who had the luck of knowing him'*.

¹ Starkey's mentor Petrie was also buried near to him when he died in Jerusalem in 1942 (at least his body was, he donated his head to the Royal College of Surgeons in London to be studied for its high intellectual capacity as he was interested in Eugenics. Because of wartime conditions it was presumed the severed head had been lost - until quite recently when it was discovered at the Royal College and was identified!). It is still there today, untouched.



Standing room only! in the Hall of Physics
Photo courtesy of Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem

Back at Lachish the camp were still in shock and all the Bedouin knew they had lost a friend – the whole countryside was miserable, Gaza, Khan Yunis, Feluja, and Inge commented in his Extraordinary Report 1 (14th January) that the women in Qubeibeh, the local village, wept bitterly – even those not connected to the Dig!. Sago Peluniot from the American School of Archaeology, Jerusalem, visited Lachish a month after the death and wrote to Madge *'everywhere in the villages you could hear people mourning over Mr. Starkey'* and Eric Wood, Imperial Airways, Gaza wrote *'the Bedouins in this vicinity too are shocked'*. Olga and Harding had the sad job of packing up the Starkeys' knickknacks and listing the contents of Starkey's rooms to send back to Madge.

Mr. Halahy from Jerusalem wrote to Madge *'our beloved Mr. Starkey – I have I lost in him a true gentleman,, so kind, generous and sincere. Everyone who knew him cried bitterly for his death'*.

Olga also wrote to Madge saying she thought a stone from Lachish with an Arab inscription should have been placed on the spot where he fell (*and it is a shame this never seemed to have happened*).

Dr. Margaret Murray said *'had he lived there is no doubt he would have been one of the great archaeologists of our time'*.



Photo: Family archive, Wendy Slaninka

CONTINUED

Part 4 (iii) Memorial Service Westminster, 18th January 1938, and aftermath and Part 5 Lachish the final season ... and beyond, Epilogue and Conclusion

Sources/Further Reading/Research:

L. Harding, Palestine Radio Broadcast, 11th January 1938 (can be viewed in Wellcome Trust archives)

Sir Frederic Kenyon, President Society of Antiquaries, Journal, Vol.18 1938

Margaret Murray, obituary, MAN, Vol XXXVIII, Nos 32-46, March 1938

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

D.L. Risdon, 'A study of the cranial and other human remains from Palestine excavated at Tel Duweir (Lachish)', July 1939

Prof. H. Torczyner, obituary Journal of Palestine Oriental Society / 'James Leslie Starkey', Haaretz, 12th January 1938

Extracts from some of the hundreds of condolence letters in the family archive

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

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.