

Alexander Henry Rhind (1833–63): a Scottish antiquary in Egypt

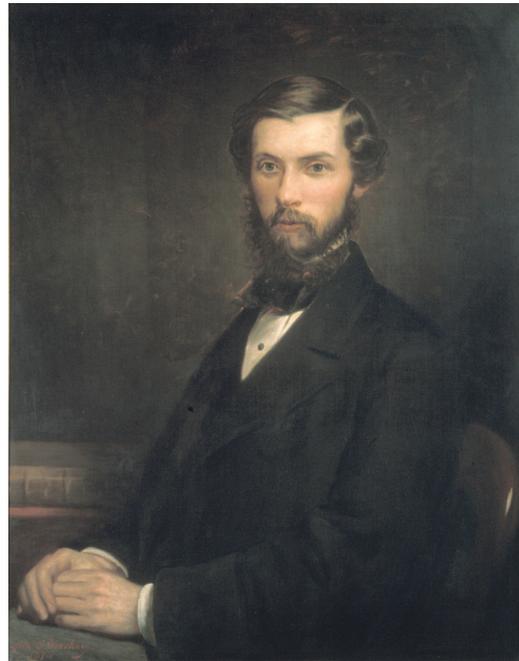
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ABSTRACT

Alexander Henry Rhind (1833–63) was one of the earliest exponents of scientific techniques and methodology in archaeological excavations, but the last in-depth survey of his life and career in the field was published in the year after his death. He undertook fieldwork in Scotland before travelling to Egypt for health reasons. There, he applied for a permit to excavate and some of his subsequent acquisitions and finds are among the finest in the collections of the British Museum and National Museums Scotland. He advocated for proper recognition and protection of monuments, in Britain and abroad, and implemented publication standards and excavation and recording methods followed by others. He may be called the first educated archaeologist to work in Egypt and publish his finds, and he left bequests to ensure the continuation of his work and to assist the work of others, such as the establishment of the prestigious annual Rhind Lecture Series. Some of his Scottish fieldwork and publications are relatively well known to scholars in this area, but he is also known to Egyptologists for artefacts such as the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus and his seminal volume Thebes: Its Tombs and Their Tenants. This paper revisits his life, with emphasis on his work beyond Scotland and his impact on the study of ancient Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

Alexander Henry Rhind is generally regarded as one of the earliest exponents of scientific techniques and methodology in archaeological excavations, but until now, the most comprehensive look at Rhind's life and career was the memoir published in 1864 by his friend and fellow antiquary, Dr John Stuart. A shorter biography by John Mowat, based on the Stuart memoir, appeared in *Caithness Sketches: M.S. Magazine of the Caithness Glasgow Literary Society* in 1912. Since then, articles include two contributions (Dodson & Janssen 1989; Dodson 2009) on Rhind and his excavations at Thebes, the former drawing particular attention to the hieratic wooden mummy labels found there. A contribution to this Society's *Proceedings* by Professor Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853–1942) on one of the artefacts from the Rhind collection, a casket of the pharaoh Amenhotep II (Petrie 1895–6), carries extra



ILLUS 1 Portrait of Alexander Henry Rhind (1874).
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significance in that Petrie himself is commonly known as the ‘father of scientific archaeology’ (Sheppard 2010: 16) or the ‘father of modern Egyptology’ (Picton 2013: 32) and is regarded as the pioneer of systematic methods in Egypt. However, it should be noted that Rhind’s work predated Petrie’s by some two decades – the latter first travelled to Egypt in 1880 (Drower 1995: 33). Furthermore, Dodson and Janssen (1989: 27) observe that ‘Petrie largely followed Rhind’s conclusions’ on the New Kingdom group found at Thebes by Rhind. Wortham (1971: ix) has noted that ‘popular histories of Egyptology ... always concentrate on the post-1894 activities of Sir Flinders Petrie’. David (1993: 43) has stated that until Petrie’s appearance, the aims of scientific archaeology had not yet been effectively attained in Egypt, although they had been outlined earlier by Rhind. Indeed, Petrie’s career mirrored Rhind’s insofar as both started their archaeological fieldwork in Britain before turning their focus towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East.¹

EARLY LIFE IN CAITHNESS AND STUDY IN EDINBURGH

Alexander Henry Rhind was born on 26 July 1833 in Sibster, Caithness, to Josiah Rhind (c 1792–1858) and Henrietta Sinclair (c 1801–before 1851). He did not marry, had no children and very little is known about his earliest years, but his siblings included sisters Alexina, Elizabeth and Jessie, and brothers Josiah and Joseph. There was possibly another brother, Alexander, who passed his name down, having died some time before Alexander Henry.² His father was a prominent member of the community, being both the Wick agent for the Commercial Bank of Scotland and sometime provost of Wick, with the result that Alexander was financially comfortable, taking over his father’s role as land-owner of Sibster – his brothers all having predeceased him.

Rhind was educated at Pultneytown Academy, Wick, and enrolled at Edinburgh University in 1848. This period in his life is of interest as Rhind is commonly known as a lawyer

and most references to his profession state him to be such (eg David 1993: 32; Strudwick 2006: 118). An enrolment list in the University of Edinburgh Archive shows that, initially at least, he was studying for a degree in literature.³ Mowat records that Rhind enjoyed his Scottish history and antiquities classes with Professor Cosmo Innes (1798–1874) so much that he was ‘an unfailingly regular attendant’ (Mowat 1912: 7). There is at present no surviving reference to him attending any other institution and at no point in all of the extant examples of Rhind’s own letters, publications, etc did he make any reference to law being his occupation. Stuart does refer to his intention to take law classes (1864: 7), but it seems to have been merely his initial intention, from which he was subsequently diverted by his interest in natural history and archaeology. Mowat (1912: 7) says that the death of Rhind’s older brother was the factor which changed his mind, but does not elaborate further. Stuart’s opinion is that it was his ill-health that diverted him, reiterated in Bierbrier (2012: 463). Curiously, Rhind’s cousin, David Bremner (1822–73) was also long described as a lawyer – he was one of the executors of the Rhind estate (which will be detailed in due course) – but it has now been established that he was a customs officer (ibid: 79–80), so the facts relating to the two men have gradually blurred through time.

INVOLVEMENT WITH ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETIES AND EFFORTS TO CHANGE TREATMENT OF ANCIENT REMAINS

On leaving Edinburgh University after apparently only two years’ attendance, Rhind’s interest in antiquities increased, and he proceeded to undertake fieldwork in Scotland. In the early 1850s, he opened a series of cairns at Yarrows in Caithness, publishing results on several of the chambers (Rhind 1854), and also wrote about the osteological remains from the broch at Kettleburn (Rhind 1851–4; 1853). These excavations paved the way for later incursions and research by others such as Robert Innes Shearer and Dr Joseph Anderson (a later Rhind Lecturer), which

marked the start of the systematic investigation of the cairns in Sutherland and Caithness (Henshall & Ritchie 1995: 6).⁴ Rhind was elected as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (hereafter SAS) in 1852, and duly appointed as an Honorary Fellow in 1857 – one of only 25 such members. Rhind had, in the intervening years, been awarded the equivalent status by the Society of Antiquaries of London, in recognition of his contributions to archaeology. It was clear that he had a very bright future, his efforts being frequently lauded by fellow antiquaries such as John Stuart.

Rhind was also nominated and subsequently accepted as a member of the Kilkenny & South-East Ireland Archaeological Society, forerunner of the Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (*Proceedings and Transactions* 1855: 369). During the meeting at which he was granted membership, a letter from Rhind was read, which suggested that much good might be done if the Society were to urge the land-owners of south-east Ireland to use their influence for the preservation of all objects of antiquity, each on his own property, as the SAS had done in Scotland, at his suggestion. Such an address exemplifies the influence Rhind already had within the antiquarian community, and the zeal with which he pursued his ideals.

Work in Scotland included the rubbings of a sculptured stone slab at Ulbster, Caithness, in 1852, sent to Dr Stuart and subsequently included in a publication on related stones (Stuart 1856: pl XL). Stuart praised Rhind's work in cleaning and restoring the stone in order for study to be undertaken (ibid: 14). Following Rhind's paper of 1854 on the comparison of Scottish and Irish cairns, Rhind wrote 'Notes of Excavations of Tumuli in Caithness made in the summer of 1856' (Rhind 1855–6b) while in residence at Sibster. This impetus was maintained at the Congress of the Archaeological Institute in Edinburgh that same year. He was heavily involved in the arrangements and was regarded as being in a large part responsible for the success of the event (Stuart 1864: 13). The Congress was also the audience for his papers 'On the History of the Systematic Classification of Primeval Relics'

(Rhind 1856a) and 'On Megalithic Remains in Malta' (Rhind 1856c), presenting his interests in wider world history and the finer points of archaeological classification. Salgona (2015: 11) confirms that present day theories regarding the origin of certain buildings reflect those of Rhind, who questioned the idea of Phoenician involvement – though his theory was not accepted in his day; it was some 50 years before the prevailing opinion changed (Grima 2005). Rhind visited Malta most notably in the company of the naturalist Andrew Leith Adams (1827–82) in 1862.⁵

Rhind then produced 'The Law of Treasure Trove: how can it best be adapted to accomplish useful results?' (1857–9a), in which he proposed that some sort of remuneration system for finders be established in order to lessen the loss of relics, which had a tendency to disappear into private collections. In previous years, he had suggested to Lord Duncan, the Scottish Lord of the Treasury, that 'all primeval vestiges should be carefully laid down on the ordnance map of Scotland, in order to furnish an index for archaeological enquiries ... [this would be] of immense service to archaeological inquiries' (ibid: 76). The Society, on the impetus of Rhind's suggestions, moved to bring the matter to the notice of other learned societies.

COMMITMENT TO EGYPT

At the time, and well into the 20th century, it was the custom for the wealthier classes to travel to warmer climes for health reasons, and many used their funds to take part in or patronise excavations. Some viewed it as merely a fashionable pastime, or simply as treasure-hunting, and those whose interest in the advancement of knowledge of the ancient world was genuine were faced with the at once thrilling and frustrating issue of being on the cusp of a new age in the field. As Thompson (2015: 149–50) points out, much of what scholars now take for granted was still unknown; many important sites were still to be discovered, and many pharaohs were still only names. At first glance, Rhind seems to fall into this category

– an affluent visitor to Egypt on account of a chronic chest condition, most likely tuberculosis. However, closer examination of his time there (and his previous work in Scotland) makes it apparent that Rhind was a conscientious, diligent archaeologist, with ideas and practices that would later become standard in the field.

Rhind had suffered from ill-health for some time, and the manifestations of pulmonary disease became more debilitating around 1853 (Stuart 1864: 7), which prompted his first visit to Egypt in 1855, having previously wintered in Clifton, Bristol (1853–4), and Ventnor, Isle of Wight (1854–5). He became intrigued by Egyptian antiquities and observed archaeological practices in progress, and became interested to such an extent that he applied to carry out his own excavations.

Rhind's efforts to change the way in which ancient remains were treated in Britain and Ireland were continued here in Egypt; he was appalled by the indiscriminate looting that took place there and was vociferous in his quest to highlight the parlous state of the monuments, publishing various open letters and papers concerning such matters in learned society journals and broadsheet newspapers. One of these was an extensive survey of 'the Present Condition of the Monuments of Egypt and Nubia' (Rhind 1856b). He came to the conclusion that the reasons seemed to be a combination of demand for building materials, apathy on the part of the relevant governments, scientific interest and straightforward vandalism. He was of the opinion that, when economics were put into the equation, even when scientific enquiry was also involved, it was 'imposed or implied that for so much expenditure so many tangible returns were expected' (Rhind 1862: 266).

In a letter of January 1857 to Dr J Barnard Davis, who was best known as a physician and craniologist, but also had interests in travelling and collecting, he said that he had obtained a permit from the viceroy, Said Pasha, to excavate anywhere in the country: '... a sort of irresponsible power ... I certainly shall not abuse it' (Stuart 1864: 13–14). He viewed the monuments of Egypt and Nubia as being at significant risk, and a greater loss would be felt than if they were

British remains; in Britain it seemed almost to be expected that monuments would suffer, and as the edifices of the more ancient civilisations were of a grander nature, proportionately the potential for harm was greater. The fact that the temples and tombs had been almost continuously inhabited meant that 'no attempt has in recent times been made to rescue them', with dwellings and detritus encroaching upon them (Rhind 1856b: 154–5). For example, at Edfu, in Upper Egypt, 'a small colony of men and cattle is established on top of the half-buried temple, after Dendera, the most perfect in Egypt ... in like manner at Luxor, squalid hovels are huddled around the splendid columns, many of which cannot be approached at all, and many only by penetrating the filthy intricacies of those miserable dwellings' (ibid: 155).

Rhind's fellow archaeologists did not escape scrutiny. Lepsius, whom Rhind clearly respected and from whose work he took notes (SAS MSS 560–2), came under criticism: his practice of removing parts of monuments for further study was, to Rhind, at the very least 'highly questionable' (Rhind 1862: 160–1). He deplored the fact that the magnificent tomb of Seti I was largely intact before the Prussian expedition overthrew a decorated column to secure a portion of it, '... leaving the remainder a scattered wreck on the floor' (ibid: 261). He held up the likes of Sir Gardner Wilkinson (1797–1895), with whom he corresponded regularly, as a model of good practice. Wilkinson was noted for his six-volume *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1837–41) and, with his fellow workers, examined and sketched the figures on the walls by the light of wax candles, rather than damage the paintings with torch smoke (Rhind 1862: 262). Rhind likened the removal of pieces of standing monuments to someone taking 'the mouldings from some remarkable gothic edifice in Germany, and deposit[ing] them in London or Paris' (ibid: 160). He felt such practice was excessive; indeed, 'the skills of the draughtsman and modeller has attained such excellence, the presence in our museums of the actual blocks ... is not so indispensable for purposes of scientific research, that whole buildings of matchless interest must be irremediably defaced to procure

them' (ibid) – in other words, copies were sufficient.

His quest to stop the defacement of monuments continued when he wrote to *The Builder* magazine, from Egypt in 1863, beginning with the complaint that the state of vandalism by European travellers was as big a problem as ever and giving examples of the disreputable behaviour of English and Americans in Egypt, with evidence of tomb doors being burned for fuel, the rough handling of native guardsmen and the general lack of respect for the country, its monuments and its people. He concluded by saying it would be beneficial for influential parties such as learned journals to state unequivocally that Egyptian monuments were protected and that foreigners were the only ones to deface them in such a manner – 'it is as foolish and unjustifiable to break off fragments or cut names on them, as it would be to attempt to do the same in the Pantheon at Rome or in Westminster Abbey', translating it into relative terms.

Between 1858 and 1862, Rhind visited Malaga, the north of Africa, the south of France and Italy where he studied Etruscan antiquities at Rome in 1859. A publication resulted in 1860 from these travels: 'Ortholithic Vestiges in North Africa and their Place in Primeval Archaeology.' He wrote to Wilkinson regarding these (MS Wilkinson d.135) and, in typical fashion, illustrated his letter with drawings and a minutely detailed description of what he had seen, especially the tombs on the Via Latina, discovered some 18 months earlier. Rhind also compares the frescoes therein with those at Pompeii, illustrating his familiarity with the latter. After visiting Rome, he intended to visit Naples and Turin at the end of April 1859 and expressed his hopes of meeting with Wilkinson again. During this period, he intermittently returned to Scotland to summer at Sibster.

Rhind wrote to an unnamed correspondent on 23 September 1862, from his then home in York Crescent, Clifton, regarding the proof of a 'Handbook of Egyptian Antiquities', and stated that he would be leaving again on 2 October, with the intention of sailing from Southampton to Egypt for the winter (MS UC 17/32). He

arrived in Egypt that autumn and began a series of systematic observations on the Nile and its deposits. His purpose was expressed in notes that may have been intended as a preface to a new volume, which he intended to publish under the title *The Nile Valley in Relation to Chronology* (Stuart 1864: 37). That winter, he was also engaged in a study of Nubian dialects – in spite of his ill-health, which had been plaguing him ever more frequently. Many of his activities had to be cut short or postponed due to lack of physical strength (ibid: 38).

Rhind wrote to Wilkinson again, from Saqqara on 21 November 1862, during what would be his last winter in Egypt. After expressing his apologies for not being able to investigate a church in which Wilkinson was interested, he noted that 'there is considerable change in lower Egypt since I left it nearly six years ago' (MS Wilkinson d.135). This is a recurring feature of Rhind's literary efforts, as will be noted further below – Rhind's interest and sympathies were not only with the ancient monuments but with the people who still dwelled around them. In his letter, he observes that the *fellahin* may be able to benefit from the circumstances 'which [have] always been so detrimental to them'. He also notes that Alexandria and Cairo are becoming 'de-Orientalised', with European elements becoming particularly apparent in the architecture.

THE EMERGENCE OF EGYPTOLOGY AND THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUMS SCOTLAND COLLECTIONS

Rhind lived at a time when Egypt loomed large in the popular imagination. Napoleon Bonaparte's epigraphic expedition to Egypt, which produced the *Description de l'Égypte* and the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in the Nile Delta in 1799, had happened within living memory.⁶ The explorer Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778–1824) had uncovered iconic objects, such as the colossal statue head of Rameses II, known as the 'Young Memnon', which still dominates the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery in the British Museum. Egypt was suffering from tomb robbery, at times

directly and indirectly as a result of newly revived interest in the ancient world, as antiquities were broken up and distributed for sale and study. Egyptology as an academic discipline was still in its infancy and, as was the case in much of the broader field of archaeology, there were as yet no standard methods of excavation, which resulted in the loss of much material of importance. For example, work by Richard Howard Vyse (1784–1853), John Shae Perring (1813–69) and Giovanni Battista Caviglia (1770–1845) at the Giza plateau produced a significant publication (Vyse 1840), that, while remaining useful today, was built on ‘gunpowder archaeology’ (David 1993: 33). Prior to Rhind, the likes of Sir John Gardner Wilkinson and the Scottish artist Robert Hay (1799–1863) devoted much of their careers to making drawings, plans and copies of inscriptions on the Egyptian monuments. These are especially valuable, for in some cases they are the only surviving records (Thompson 2015: 152) and Hay’s work was arguably more detailed and accurate than the *Description* (ibid: 185–6). However, there was no meaningful control of fieldwork until the foundation of the Egyptian Antiquities Service in the 1850s by Said Pasha (David 1993: 34).

Rhind’s artefacts make up a sizeable proportion of the Egyptian collection of National Museums Scotland (NMS), the history of which is somewhat tangled, being the end result of the amalgamation of several different entities: the museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, which became the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland in 1858; the Royal Scottish Museum; and the collections of the Natural History Museum of Edinburgh University (Manley & Dodson 2010: 14–20). Rhind wrote to Wilkinson in 1859 about the arrangements for the Museum, ‘containing [my] Egyptian things’ (MS Wilkinson d.137). A letter to Dr Stuart, dated 24 January 1856, outlines some of his intentions:

It is my earnest desire to add to our museum such a series of Egyptian antiquities as will form a fair comparative representation of the archaeology of the extraordinary people who lay so near the primary fountains of civilisation. With this view, I

shall gladly purchase where I can, objects suitable for my purpose ... with the view of supplementing where the results of my own excavations may be wanting

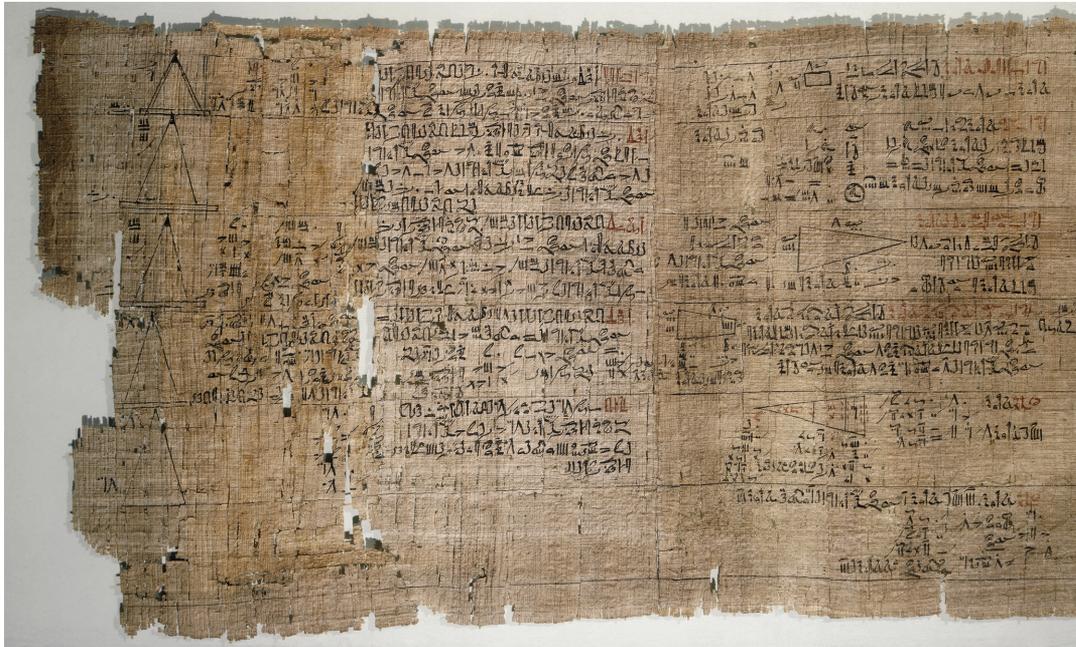
(Stuart 1864: 11)⁷

It is well established that many of the most important Egyptian artefacts in the collections of NMS came from Rhind: ‘Much of the material he brought back and left to the nation is of first-rate importance’, according to one of the Museum’s former Keepers, Cyril Aldred (1914–91), cited in Manley and Dodson (2010: 15). Incidentally, not all of the Rhind collection resides in Edinburgh; some of the minor Rhind artefacts were transferred to Paisley Museum in the 1950s, for reasons unclear at present.⁸

Detailed study of the material obtained or excavated by Rhind is beyond the scope of this paper but NMS highlights include the possibly unique late Roman Period double coffin of two boys, Petamun and Penhorpabik (NMS A.1956.357);⁹ the early Roman period funeral canopy of Montsaf (NMS A.1956.353);¹⁰ the aforementioned hieratic wooden mummy labels (NMS A.1956.165);¹¹ two bilingual hieratic-Demotic papyri (NMS A.1956.314–15);¹² and the so-called ‘Rhind mummy’ (NMS A.1956.352).¹³ Objects held at the British Museum include the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus (BM EA 10057–8) – which will be examined briefly – the Mathematical Leather Roll (BM EA 10250)¹³ and the magical text, Bremner-Rhind Papyrus Papyrus (BM EA10188,1).¹⁴

THE RHIND MATHEMATICAL PAPYRUS

The Rhind Mathematical Papyrus (hereafter RMP) is the most significant mathematical document from ancient Egypt. Rhind actually purchased it in Luxor, from Edwin Smith in 1858; it was supposedly found in a ruined building close to the mortuary temple of Rameses II, at Thebes (Robins & Shute 1987: 9). Smith (1822–1906) was an American who came to live in Egypt in 1858, setting up as a money-lender and dealer, acquiring four of the most important scientific texts ever found (Reeves 2000: 57). It is



ILLUS 2 The Rhind Mathematical Papyrus (EA 10057-8). Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum

perhaps somewhat ironic that, in this case, Rhind obtained his papyrus in the very manner of which he deplored, ie plundered tomb relics being sold on for profit; however, his purchase saved the text from perhaps being lost or disappearing into a private collection. As previously mentioned, he intended to buy, where possible, artefacts to supplement what his own excavations were lacking (Stuart 1864: 12).

Rhind did not have the opportunity to do any work on it himself in the remainder of his lifetime, but recognised its significance and sent it to his friend, Dr Samuel Birch (1813–85), head of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum, for study and translation. Birch also translated two other papyri found at Thebes (Rhind & Birch 1863). Some fragments of the RMP are currently at Brooklyn Museum of Art (37.1748Ea–b), having seemingly found their way there with another unrelated papyrus.

The RMP is essentially a list of mathematical problems and one of its most illuminating aspects is that it shows the ancient Egyptians' major achievement in calculating the area of a circle

according to the length of its diameter. It is also exceptional in presenting a table of fractions in which the numerator is two (Shaw & Nicholson 1995: 174).

The papyrus is not for training someone to be a mathematician, but rather gives an insight into administration in Egyptian society. Additionally, it gives confirmation of historical events; one of the defining aspects of the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt was the invasion and subsequent battles with the Hyksos people, and evidence for the final phase of this war, in the 11th regnal year of an unknown king, is found in fragmentary notes on the verso of the papyrus (Bourriau 2000: 212).¹⁶

THEBES ... AND OTHER SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

In 1862, the most important of Rhind's publications on Egypt was published: *Thebes: Its Tombs and Their Tenants* is an in-depth account of the work undertaken by Rhind in the Sheikh

Abd el-Qurna area, meticulous in its detail. It encompasses aspects of the excavations, the topography and climate and general history of the region and was reprinted in 2002. Rhind proposed that to understand a site, all elements had to be examined together, ie studying one aspect in isolation would give a skewed perception. Therefore, he recorded every aspect of a site, even including the modern-day inhabitants of the region. This built on a concept laid out in *Egypt: Its Climate, Character and Resources as a Winter Resort* (Rhind 1856d). Although the site being excavated was 2,000 years distant from these people, he maintained that links and patterns could be seen, both in the past and in the present: ‘it must be a very determined antiquarianism that, even on such a site as that of Thebes, can, under the circumstances, look so exclusively to the past as to close its eyes to the living interests’ (Rhind 1862: vii–viii). Rhind also had a very realistic perception of his own work; while clearly well-informed – he quotes from a range of Classical and modern European sources – he directs the reader to other scholars in instances where it would prove impractical and distracting to diverge from the main topic in question, or indeed where another scholar was a greater authority, always giving credit to others where it was due. The reader is taken on a journey through the landscape in the Theban area, and is offered a synopsis of what is known about the city from antiquity. He establishes that in spite of its reputation, it is surprisingly only known in passive terms, and pictorial allusions are few; even the evocative epithet of ‘hundred-gated Thebes’ is played down by the historian Diodorus Siculus, writing in the 1st century BC, as being a mere general reference to its many temples (ibid: 16). Therefore, there is no general contemporary description from antiquity, much less detail of the area, and nothing about the internal structure of Thebes. In spite of the lack of literary sources regarding Thebes, Rhind noted that certain information can be gleaned from scenes painted on temple walls, frescoes, and so on. While they adhere to the principles of Egyptian art and therefore are limited in their sense of realism, the basic elements of, for example, a typical Egyptian house are apparent;

in some respects, Rhind felt that the limitations of the art were also their strength, in that the lack of scope for individuality meant a uniformity and distinctiveness (ibid: 28).

Sheikh Abd el-Gurna, one of the sites from which he gained the most results, is introduced and, as was his custom, the environment of the area is described in detail, and includes a plate ‘necessary to show the actual topography’ (ibid: 38). This is insightful, as often elsewhere readers would have had to rely on the writer’s interpretation; Rhind frequently used his own descriptions and a visual comparison, demonstrating his perceptiveness in recognising different strata; the analysis makes it clear that Rhind was aware of the sequence of events in the building of the necropolis and its environs through time – a recurrent theme throughout the book.

One particular paragraph stands out, which illustrates Rhind’s adherence to his principles of accurate representation and description, foreshadowing the present-day methods of recording sites:

Unfortunately, as we shall have again to remark, adequate data are wanting for the accurate or even approximate apportionment of those and other such objects according to their original collocation in the tombs. And so, thus much of the internal arrangements of these, either in their individual character, or in their classification with reference as well as to their plan as to their relative dates and locality, can be but partially and indistinctly made out. Nor is it only a breach in mere barren antiquarian completeness that this is to be regretted, if it be remembered that through the sepulchres and vestiges of Egypt, the path lies to so large a proportion of the few now available sources of knowledge of the ancient world.

(ibid: 60–1)

The context of all of Rhind’s Theban work is outlined with the results of ‘former sepulchral researches’, ie a literature review: ‘with Egyptian museums of extraordinary variety and extent formed under national auspices in at least eight capital cities ... with all those masses of relics ... it might seem paradoxical that the details of Egyptian sepulture should be known only from

exceedingly slight and often indefinite data' (ibid: 62). He also uses the opportunity to reinforce his belief in monument protection and stress the unfortunate situation in which, for many of the Egyptian antiquities scattered around Europe, there is no record to determine even which part of the country they were excavated in, much less from what tomb and the circumstances in which they were discovered. He does concede that it is not always the fault of the excavator: reasons include ancient and modern pillaging, especially as many of the native villagers were very practiced in the art of looting and dealing: 'the chances were not likely to be numerous, especially in the more celebrated burial-places, of tombs having escaped in their original integrity, for inquirers who had come so late in the day' (ibid: 66–7).

The entire work is executed with his customary precision, acute observation, understanding and sense of duty, and while some of the information and theories therein are perhaps somewhat outdated and in need of revision, it was ahead of its time and a model for subsequent reports. His ability to see past the opulence of many of Egypt's remains to the humbler vestiges gave him valuable insights into their society – this approach was developed further by the likes of Petrie. It is demonstrated well in *Thebes* and in his paper on an excavation at Giza (Rhind 1855–6a), which he undertook in March 1856:

The splendour and costly care which characterized the funeral customs of the ancient Egyptians, as evinced in the case of royal, noble or wealthy personages, which dazzle by their magnificence ... from their comprehensive design, naturally detract from the interest with which simple forms of burial, calculated for those in humble life, would otherwise be regarded ... yet the characteristic peculiarities of graves of this latter type are worthy of being noted.

(ibid: 274)

Rhind then proceeds in his customary manner, describing the tombs: multiple burials, with some bones still intact, although the skull was greatly decayed and eventually was lost (Rhind 1862: 174). The dimensions of the graves are recorded, and the article is accompanied with (what looks

to be) a scaled illustration, or at least as close to scale as possible, with the finds plotted in their positions within (Rhind 1855–6a: 275).

Weeks (2009: 9) refers specifically to the significance of Rhind's assessment of his find at Giza – that he was one of the first to recognise the existence of a Predynastic culture in Egypt. Rhind believed that the graves undoubtedly came from a very remote period in the past, which he inferred from various elements, including the great simplicity of the grave goods contained therein and the relative position of the tomb, being very close to the Great Pyramid and in the centre of a necropolis of the Old Kingdom (c 2686–2181 BC).¹⁷ Also, the fact that the bones had not been subjected to any form of mummification made the burial almost certainly Predynastic (Rhind 1855–6a: 274), ie before 3000 BC. Reassessment of the assemblage may in fact now point to a slightly later date in the Early Dynastic (c 3000–c 2686 BC), due to the focus of the burial on the vicinity of the Old Kingdom cemetery, although Egyptian sites of various types were frequently associated with earlier places of significance (Wilkinson 2000: 36). However, at the time, the assignment of the burial to the Predynastic period was a logical and relatively accurate conclusion.

'A PRECIOUS BEQUEST ... HIS BRIGHT AND SHINING CAREER'

After suffering many periods of ill-health, Rhind finally succumbed to pulmonary disease on his way home from Egypt in 1863. His servant, James Fisher, wrote to Rev John Earle, Rector of Swanswick, near Bath, to impart the sad news that Rhind had died peacefully in his sleep in Zürich, Switzerland, on 3 July, a few weeks short of his 30th birthday (Stuart 1864: 39). It is possible that he actually died at La Majolica, Italy, as stated by Bayne (2004: n. pag.), and Stuart (1864: 37) mentions a letter being written from that location a few weeks beforehand. The precise location is still to be confirmed through archival sources. However, given Fisher's anecdotal evidence and the fact that he was listed in the *Tagblatt der Stadt Zürich* of 4 July 1863 as

being in residence in a hotel there,¹⁸ at the time of writing, the Swiss location seems more likely – indeed, his gravestone also cites Zürich, as do all of the currently available extant genealogical records. His body was brought back to Scotland and he was buried in the Old Parish Kirkyard in Wick, Caithness. Only the day before, a notice of a work-in-progress on Egyptian chronology, ‘containing the result of observations made during a voyage on the Nile, from the second cataract to the sea’, was printed in *The Bradford Observer*; this was, unfortunately, not to be completed.

His assets amounted to around £19,527, along with some personal effects sold at auction in Bristol. The main instructions for dispersal of his estate were, as summarised in the Stuart memoir: £7,000 to establish an educational establishment in the Wick area; the endowment of two scholarships at the University of Edinburgh and the funding of an academic lecture series by the SAS. Rhind also left his 1,600-volume library and the copyright of his treatise *Thebes* to the SAS, along with £400 ‘for the purpose of carrying out systematic excavations in this (ie Sutherland) and the neighbouring county of Caithness, where such remains also abounded, in the hope that a more definite result would be attained than from the casual explorations on which we had hitherto been mostly dependant’ (Simpson 1864: 628). The terms of the bequest permitted the Society to delay the expenditure for up to ten years to allow them to find the right opportunity and competent excavators (Stuart 1864: 55). *Facsimile of Two Papyri Found in a Tomb at Thebes* was published posthumously (Rhind & Birch 1863) and his notes on Nubian dialects were appended to the Stuart memoir in 1864.

Stuart’s memoir is probably the most lucid account of the loss felt on a professional and personal level: ‘we mingle with our sorrow admiration of his noble and unselfish character, and cherish as a precious bequest the example of his bright and earnest career’ (1864: 44). Numerous obituaries appeared in various journals and newspapers as some measure of his impression upon the archaeological community, such as in *The Scotsman* on 8 July 1863. Andrew Leith Adams expressed his dismay at Rhind’s

notes from Malta not being yet published or even edited: ‘I regret this much, being fully aware of their accuracy and high scientific value’ (Adams 1870: 2). Stuart (1864: 42), referring to the SAS, said that ‘there had been no step of progress of any importance during the last ten years in which he could not trace [Rhind’s] influence more or less directly’. With regard to Rhind’s motivation, he expressed his opinion that the love of truth in the advancement of knowledge was the distinguishing feature of his mind, and his eager pursuit of archaeological studies were founded on that principle; ‘every object of antiquity was valued by him only in its relation to the history of man’s progress, and instead of forming a private collection, for which he had so many facilities, he from the first resolved to place all the objects which he could acquire in a public museum, where classification and accessibility might render them of real value’ (ibid).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Alexander Henry Rhind set a very early example of the usefulness of precision and context in excavating and recording. He vilified the practice of removing antiquities for sale and/or without proper recordings of context and so on; note the promptness with which he severed his acquaintance of Edwin Smith when Rhind discovered that he was possibly dealing in fake antiquities (Kilgour 1993: 293). While he resorted to purchases to supplement his own excavations, these were procured legally, and he ensured that any available information regarding context and circumstances was recorded. Stuart’s comment that ‘it will have been seen that *thoroughness* was the predominating feature of his character and that it entered into all his pursuits’ (1864: 41) highlights this underlying trait that made him the archaeologist he was. His pursuit of excavating and publishing is possibly all the more impressive when taking his ill-health into consideration.

Rhind was held in great esteem, as evidenced by the testimony of his contemporaries, although his considerable reputation was curtailed by his early death. It can only be surmised how his career would have developed – in particular,

it would have been most interesting if he had met Flinders Petrie. However, archaeologists today employ some of the methods and ideals demonstrated by Rhind a century and a half ago, and benefit from being able to study finds that in other hands may not have been preserved. Some of his artefacts number among the greatest finds of Egyptology. The recent ‘Fascinating Mummies’ exhibition (NMS: 2012) displayed selected artefacts from Rhind’s ‘Tomb of a Theban Dignitary’ as highlights – notably the wooden vaulted coffin of Calisiris (NMS A.1956.351), and an unidentified female mummy – together with the hieratic wooden mummy labels. The aforementioned mummy in particular (‘the Rhind Mummy’) – was used to demonstrate progress in scientific non-invasive analysis (NMS 2012: 39), which would not be possible without Rhind’s foresight in keeping the mummy intact at a time when unwrapping, both for academic interest and amateur curiosity, was common (Ikram & Dodson 1998: 69–72). Likewise, it has been possible more recently to obtain images of the papyri interred with the children in the double coffin, allowing the texts to be studied for the first time in two millennia. The Rhind Lecture Series is arguably the way in which his name is most relevant today, offering a platform for scholars from diverse areas of interest to present current research – reflecting the wide interests and vision of Rhind himself – but Egyptology owes him a debt of gratitude also.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 For a fuller appraisal of Flinders Petrie’s life and career see Drower 1995; also Bierbrier 2012 for

entries on most of the Egyptological persons in this paper.

- 2 Thanks to Dyan Hilton for assistance in obtaining this information.
- 3 No official archive reference available at the time of writing.
- 4 For Scottish antiquarianism see Bell (ed) 1981; further details of the work of Joseph Anderson in particular can be found in Clarke 2002.
- 5 Further insights into his investigations in Malta can be found in his personal notebooks, currently held in the SAS Library (MSS 560–2).
- 6 The discovery of the Rosetta Stone and the story of hieroglyphic decipherment is given fuller treatment in Parkinson 1999 and Robinson 2012.
- 7 The Edinburgh Egyptian collection was catalogued by Murray in 1900.
- 8 The Paisley Egyptian collection was catalogued by Hunter and Hunter in 2005.
- 9 The double coffin was published in Manley and Dodson 2010: 140–2; the mummies were examined in Dawson 1926–7.
- 10 The funeral canopy was published in Millar 1891–2; Manley and Dodson 2010: 124–5.
- 11 The mummy labels were published in Dodson and Janssen 1989.
- 12 The papyri were published in Riggs 2005: 45–7.
- 13 Details of the Rhind mummy can be found in NMS 2012: 38–9 and at <https://vimeo.com/36691281> (live as of 01/03/2016).
- 14 The Mathematical Leather Roll was published in Glanville 1927.
- 15 Bremner-Rhind Papyrus was published in several articles by Faulkner in 1936–8.
- 16 For more detail on the papyrus, see Peet 1923.
- 17 General dates for Egyptian time periods taken from Bard 2015.
- 18 Thanks to Brendan O’Connor for this information.

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