

# QURNA DISCOVERY

Friends News  
Issue 1

August 2008

Theban Panoramas News  
Issue 7

**Qurna Discovery opened April 6th 2001. Despite two changes of venue it is still going strong, and entry is still free. It now holds four different exhibitions and is visited by many local residents, other Egyptians and people from all over the world.**



Last December many of the new houses in new, 'New Qurna' the estate built to the north were ready and the Government started the big move. Then the bulldozers and trucks moved onto the hillside and demolished the houses. It was time for Qurna Discovery to move again, and we saw an opportunity to save a unique group of historic properties for exhibition purposes.

This is the first proper newsletter for Qurna Discovery since 2004, and the first for the **Friends of Qurna Discovery**, set up in 2007.

**The Friends are supporting the restoration and conservation of, and the display of exhibitions in, three adjacent properties a family home of the Daramallis, the zawyeh and a bab el-hagar (tomb house) at the back.**

The Zawyeh - (community room)  
The zawyeh, two rooms behind it and the big side passage have been restored new ceilings where necessary, new plaster, new floor to passage, and the walls all painted with 'heba' diluted natural mud. The ugly front wall has been taken away and a copy of the original wooden verandah made in the front. The building looks and feels lovely.

The Qurna Discovery exhibitions

have been installed together with the string spot lighting we have used in the previous venues.

The Robert Hay exhibition is in the zawyeh, with the panoramas themselves in the two rooms behind, and Living Villages is in the big side passage.

The passage had a back opening which led to other properties and needed to be permanently blocked, but it cried out for something a bit special. Tim Simpson kindly designed a site specific barrier which has been made by a firm of metal workers in As-Siyul, and we now have a unique piece of artwork which greets people entering from the zawyeh.

**The exhibitions will be open**

**Saturday Thursday (closed Fridays) 8.00am to 4.30pm. Entry free.**

Thank you to Abdu Daramalli and all the Qurna team: Ahmed, Hajj Mahmoud, Mubarak, Najjar, Mohamed, Hussein, Gabr, Abd Sabur, Tayib Mahmoud, Ba'ebish, Qumsan Mohamed, Hassan, Mahruz, Mohamed abu Saleh, Mohamed abu Sheba, Sabri, Mohmoud al Azab, Mohamed, Amr, Said, Bedawi, and electrician Ramadan and assistant Ahmed.

## AGM

Thursday September 11th  
in London - see page 2

## From the Secretary:

Dear Friends of QD,

As of now you are a pretty select group - we only have 23 members so far but you come from Egypt, Jordan, the US, UK, and we look forward to the membership increasing in the coming months and years. Some supporters have preferred just to donate as they are probably Friends of many organisations already.

I was in Qurna October 15<sup>th</sup> to November 5<sup>th</sup> last year, helping to put up the exhibitions, sorting out the lighting, and getting the essential permissions. The buildings on the world heritage site belong to the state and are under the authority of the Supreme Council for Antiquities (SCA), and we obtained Dr Zahi Hawass' signature on the formal permission on October 30<sup>th</sup>.

It all looked very good in the zawyeh when we had a small Opening ceremony. The Daramalli House is 'a work in progress', and the bab el-hagar awaits.

Thank you all for your encouragement and support. I hope to see many of you at the AGM.

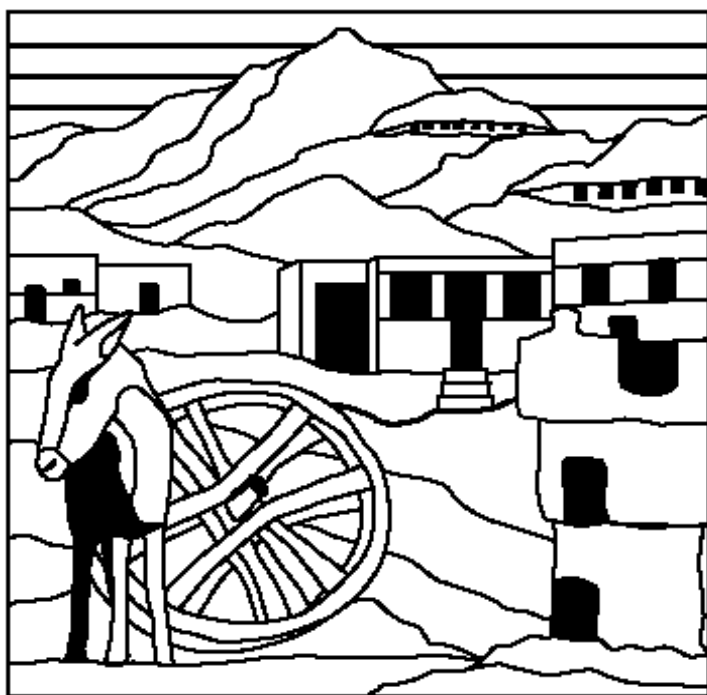
Good wishes  
Caroline Simpson

## AGM

The AGM of the Friends of Qurna Discovery will be on Thursday September 11<sup>th</sup> at 6.30pm.

It will be held at: The Bank of New York Mellon Centre  
160 Queen Victoria Street  
London EC4V 4LA  
courtesy of our Treasurer's employers. We shall be on the ground floor.

We shall have a light bread, cheese and fruit supper. In addition to the formal business of the meeting the Secretary will give a talk on 'Qurna since Antiquity' and we hope to show the earthen buildings exhibition which went to Mali in February. Do come and meet your fellow Members and help us with ideas on raising the rest of the money we need.



The metal barrier at the back of the *bawaba* - big passage. On the right seen as you exit the main zawyeh. When the project is finished you will see through it to the *bab el-hagar* - the tomb house.

Designed by Tim Simpson and made by Qurna master craftsman.



# New exhibition and panels

## Zawaya of Qurna

A new panel joined the collection in October. It is about the many zawaya in the hamlets. Dr Boutros, who most kindly translated all the text into Arabic, and another Egyptian from Cairo, both questioned the purpose of it saying, quite rightly, that Qurnawi know about zawaya.

The aim of the panel is firstly to be a record of a number of zawaya on the hillside many of which have now been demolished, and secondly to give the history of this particular zawyeh as we know it so far.

The photos, old and new, came from the Qurna History Project resource collection. We have narrowed the date of the building to between 1895 and 1910.

An 1895 photo in the Egypt Exploration Society archives shows that the zawyeh was not there in its present form at that date, and a photo of 1910 by Arthur Weigall shows it with its wooden verandah and the adjacent big wooden door (bawaba). We hope to find further photographic evidence to date it even more precisely so if your ancestors visited Thebes at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, do look in their photo collection. All objects and buildings over 100 years old are 'Antiquities' in Egyptian law, so the zawyeh is probably an antiquity in its own right by now.

Thank you to Tim Simpson of Plunge Productions for the lovely design work which has already been much admired by Qurnawi, and thank you to Dr Boutros for the Arabic translation. You can see the exhibition panel on our website, [www.qurna.org](http://www.qurna.org) - it is a link on the Qurna Discovery page.



Susan Weeks, Mary Magalli and an English permanent resident of Qurna at the Opening, with the Zawyeh panel on the wall behind.



A local Antiquities Inspector looking at the The Bogdadi Saqieh with its exhibition. This is now outside the zawyeh.

## Living Villages in the City of the Dead

was the first exhibition to be made in 1997 and we have now added two new double panels which cover the last 10 years. Original documents and photos from the QHP collection have been used to illustrate events including the opening of the new bridge, the massacre in Hatshepsut's Temple, Sheikh Tayib's relocation, the gradual move of the Qurnawi and the most recent exodus and demolitions. The story ends with part of an article by Dr Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, "Qurna...a history which shall not die".

## The story of Qurna Discovery

Another three new double panels tell the story of the exhibitions themselves: Living villages exhibited in Oxford and Cairo in 1997, the first venue and the restoration of the Omda House 2001, the second venue and Golo's wonderful Qurna Mural of 2004, the team of workers who have made it all possible, and the ceremonies to celebrate openings. We hope the panels explain why the exhibitions were made and also give them a legitimacy and a certain protection at a time of general destruction in Qurna. Thanks to Tim Mitchell, Sandrine Gamblin and Zoe Simpson for reviewing and enhancing the text, to Dr Boutros for the Arabic translation, and to Stan Kurowski and Google Earth for additional photos.

## Family Matters

Gabr, our Guardian, got married to Gha'da' Youssef last year and in June they had a baby girl. Congratulations to all. Abdu got married to Nadjua, a grand-daughter of Sheik Ali abd er Rasul, and they are expecting their first baby in September. Our very best wishes to all.



### The Daramalli House

This has also been restored with new ceilings where necessary, new plaster throughout, some new floors, window and door repairs or replacement and all the scruffy outside enclosures removed. It has been painted externally in traditional colours and looks very smart indeed. The interior is now painted a traditional pale wash and the bedrooms will soon have a final traditional stencil treatment. Many items of furniture and equipment have been collected and will be installed soon. It will then be open the same hours as the zawyeh and have its own Guardian. We have photos of the interior before restoration which will be displayed. The family have found a number of old photos of family members which will also be on show. There is much work to be done on the displays and presentation. Private collections of objects, photos and drawings have been promised by Mrs Susan Weeks, Dr Horst Jaritz and others. It is a real 'work in progress'.

Thank you to all the craftsmen, artists and workers, and to Dr Mansour, and the local Inspectors from the Supreme Council of Antiquities, West Bank.



Photo taken in 1999 when it was lived in by Abdu Daramalli, his father and mother and two brothers and two sisters and his uncle and aunt and their six children. Then there was the all-important donkey, and the chickens and ducks and maybe a goat or two.

### Ownership of the exhibitions

Qurna Discovery, from its beginning in 1997, had been a private project later supported by donations and sponsorship, but a private project. The exhibitions had been created 'for Qurna' but this concept was somewhat vague. They show elements of the history of this community and explain the problems and solutions to living with the monuments. After 2001 when they had a permanent venue they were in a Qurna building,

restored by Qurnawi hands, with a Qurnawi guardian, and all overseen by Abdu Daramalli who was born and raised on the hillside. But until early 2007 the exhibitions were owned and controlled by Caroline Simpson. It was a long-term intention to give the exhibitions to someone in Qurna who would be interested in their display.

It became clear in March 2007 that their ownership by a foreigner might be detrimental to their welfare and future display on the hillside. The

Qurna Discovery exhibitions and all the effects connected with them were formally given to Abdu Daramalli in the firm knowledge that he and his fine team will do their very best to ensure that they are looked after and displayed for all to see. A certain 'colonial' era has closed, but we hope that the **Friends** will now provide the equivalent of 'international aid' to enable the Qurnawi themselves to do whatever is necessary to achieve what they see as culturally beneficial.



### **The Bab el-hagar tomb house**

No work has been done yet on clearing the bab el-hagar and conserving the mud structures. Dr Elina Paulin-Grothe, archaeologist and Egyptologist who has lived and worked in Qurna for many years, has kindly agreed to supervise this work, and a colleague has kindly agreed to do the necessary consolidation work with local help. We plan to

have the simple spot lighting used for the Hay exhibition. When open, this venue also requires a Guardian. Because all three properties, although adjacent, are self-contained, it would be impossible for one person to look after the visitors and exhibits in all three at the same time. Each venue requires its own Guardian, and the cost of this is included in the Appeal target for the Friends.

### **Muddy waters recent happenings**

The majority of the text of this newsletter was written in early November 2007, and reflected what had happened to that date. Since then Qurna Discovery has got caught up in a bit of a cultural power-struggle. A Cairo Fine Arts Professor was given permission by the Minister of Culture, Farouk Hosni, another fine artist, to carry out what he calls an Artists' Atelier Project. The professor came to Qurna and saw the two buildings lovingly restored by Qurna Discovery, and took down the exhibitions and took over the buildings for use by modern artists from Cairo and the art schools. Notices were put up saying 'Cultural Development Fund'. It was not made clear to him at the start that these buildings had already got permission to be used for historic exhibitions, and

that they had been restored by private money specifically for that purpose. The Supreme Council for Antiquities, which has authority over world heritage sites in Egypt, is a department of the Ministry of Culture, and the whole situation had become tangled and difficult. There have been many emails, phone calls, and meetings between Qurna Discovery personnel and officials of The Governorates of Luxor and Qurna, the Ministry of Culture and the SCA and even involving the Security Services Chief (top police official) in Luxor. Dr Hawass has again confirmed his intentions for the buildings to be used as he had agreed last October.

In theory it was agreed by all parties at a meeting on December 24<sup>th</sup> 2007 that the artists will find another venue and that Qurna

### **Money Matters**

Our initial target was £20,000. This would cover all the restoration work, the installation of the exhibitions, and the Guardians for 5 years. The money started to come in, but we had to borrow to get the work done - any delay and the buildings would have been demolished. Due to the problems outlined below (see Muddy waters), we had to stop fundraising while the whole project was in doubt. We are now back on track and **need to raise £11,000**. All suggestions and contacts would be most useful. **Please help us get to our target.**

**Thank you** to all our donors and Friends. Kent and Susan Weeks, Michelle Brown, Yvonne Neville-Rolph, Geoffrey Roper, Alick Hay, Anne Midgley, C. Simpson, Cecilia Duggan, Leslie Lonsdale-Cooper, Helen Lowell, Bletchley Archaeological and Historical Society, Hisham Khatib, Jaromir Malek, T.G.H. James, Tim Mitchell and Lila Abu-Lughod, Ena Halmos, Deborah Manley, Peta Rée, Mrs R Nwume, Diana Mason, Catherine and John Rutherford, Maureen el Hadi, Pat Mortimer, Sarah Thorley, Robert Muir, Charles Plouviez, Rob Robson, Loutfy Boulos, Peter Losson, Diana Magee, Robert Hay, E. R., Anthea and Evan Davies, Nawal Hassan, Mary Magalli, Jane Taylor, Caroline Williams, Aidan Dodson and Anon.

Discovery will again be able to use the buildings for the exhibitions. In practice, this has taken many months, but on May 30<sup>th</sup> we were told the zawyeh had been vacated, and the exhibitions at last came out of store. The zawyeh opened again for visitors at the end of June. The Daramalli House has not yet been vacated, but the Committee of the Friends and many supporters in Egypt and outside have written to Dr Hawass and we have heard that this should happen shortly. We are very hopeful that it will all get sorted out soon and that both buildings and their exhibitions will be open for visitors as agreed. Thank you to Dr Hawass for his support and for negotiating on our behalf and the Home Team for all their work - yet again.



# News

August 2008

ISSUE 2

**Qurna History Project is the bringing together of different strands of historical work that have grown over the last fourteen years. Qurna Discovery is one part of the project.**

**Caroline Simpson, coordinator of the Qurna History Project, writes:**

In January 2007 I went to a conference on the history of the Qus area some 50 km north of Qurna. It was held in a very large, modern Coptic monastery on the edge of the desert which was built as a conference centre. I gave an illustrated talk about the history of Qurna and met a number of interesting historians of all periods from Egypt and abroad. As it turned out there was little of direct relevance to the history of Qurna, except current research on the shifting path of the Nile in this area over history which will prove interesting.

In early February 2008 I indulged my passion for mud. The 2008 Terra conference was held in Mali, and I made a new exhibition on the 'Earthen Structures of Qurna' which was displayed there. This illustrates the range of Qurnawi structures from the grain stores and menama, to houses and mosques, and very simply tells the story from the early tomb dwellings to the recent relocation and demolitions. The exhibition was well received and it was a delight to see the keen interest taken by four young conservators from Luxor and Qurna who looked at their own local culture with new eyes. One copy of the exhibition was left in Mali at the National Exhibition Centre, and one is

kept in the UK and is available for display - do contact me.

Ancient Egypt magazine, December 2007/January 2008, features an article on Qurna Discovery, pp 43 and 44.

I gave a talk on 'The Theban West Bank since 'antiquity'' at the Egypt Exploration Society (EES) Conference in June in London. This was accompanied by 100 images on power point most of which had to be scanned from slides taken many years ago. Sussex Egyptology Society has invited me to do a repeat performance in October.

## Old Photos

While searching for photos contemporary with the zawyeh I consulted those held by the EES in London. They don't have many 19<sup>th</sup> century ones, but they do have one fine collection taken by Joseph Grafton Milne in 1895/6. These photos are of remarkable clarity and a set show the Theban/Qurna hillside from the south of Medinet Habu and Qurnet Marei to the north of Dra abul Naga. These have been scanned and should enable us to date quite a number of the hillside properties, a few of which still existed, despite the recent demolitions.

Does anyone have any information about the early photographer/traveller Mr J Nicholson, who visited Qurna with Henry Rhind in 1955? He took the photo which Rhind had copied for the well-known lithograph of the Yanni House - below. Any information on the man, or on any possible extant photo collection would be very gratefully received.



Above is Robert de Rustafjaell's photo of c.1907 of Fendia, with her son Ahmed Abd er Rasul, and his daughter and grand-daughter. It is probably the earliest photo of a **named** Upper Egyptian country woman. Half of Horubat is descended from Fendia.

## The final chapter?



The latest chapter in Qurna's history has been the relocation of most of the residents and the wholesale demolition of their built culture, especially in Dra abul Naga (see above) and Horubat (Nobles Tombs). Some shops selling alabaster and stone crafts have been retained, for the present, but residents have moved to the 'new village' (below) where there is piped water.



There is talk of some 25 remaining buildings forming 'an artists village' whatever that might mean. The fact that Qurnet Marei makes an ideal and lucrative film location seems likely to support the preservation of that southern and most recent part of Qurna. Until now, no great concentration of tombs below these houses has been found.

The authorities are building more houses on the new estate and then the rest of the Qurnawi will have to move.



### Plus ça change ....

The photo above is one of the 272 wonderful photos in Borchardt and Ricke's *EGYPT - Architecture Landscape Life of the People*, published in 1929. There are many taken in Thebes and 11 showing life in Qurna at that time.

This photo shows the family dwelling just below the tomb of Nakht, where Fatima who, as a child, used to make and sell Qurna dollies, now lives

with her husband and children. She still makes dollies, and has a wider group of small craft items for sale. A dwelling here with many mud structures is seen in the Rhind lithograph of 1855. This large mud storage structure is decorated with raised stylised lizards.

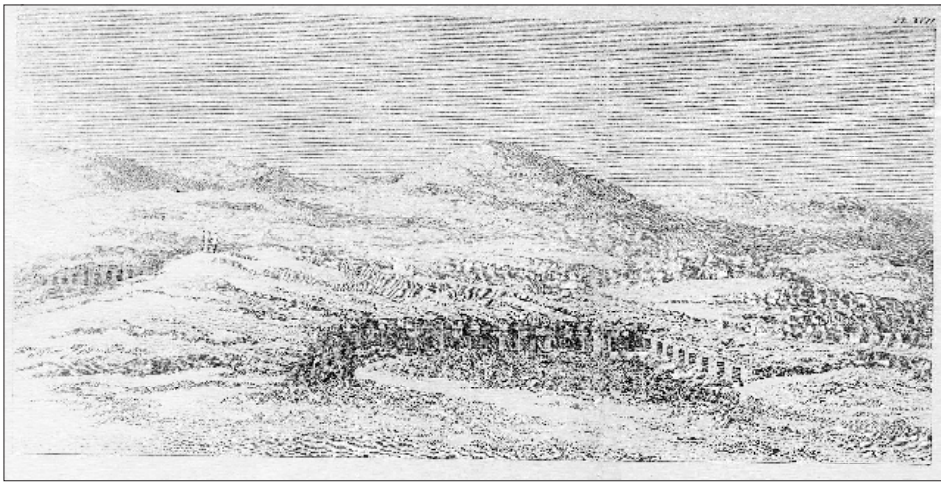
In the top right corner you can see the pillared façade of the Q.D. zawyeh. The other houses to the left of the zawyeh are no more.

Do look on the Q H P website, where you will find various articles and information about Qurna.

[www.qurna.org](http://www.qurna.org)

Many thanks to Charlie Ridley for being 'webmaster' for some years.

If your local society would like an illustrated talk about any aspect of the QHP or Qurna history, do contact Caroline Simpson: [Caroline@forbury.demon.co.uk](mailto:Caroline@forbury.demon.co.uk)



## Trying to clear up a mystery.

In his damning account of French military behaviour used against the Qurnawi in 1798/9, Vivant Denon mentions in passing that one whole residential area was dynamited.

The communities that the French found so maddening lived in the huge *saff* tombs in Tarif. *Saff* is the Arabic word for row or line, but in this context refers to the rock-cut tombs of the early 11th Dynasty with large open-air rectangular courts and rows of chambers cut into the hillside creating pillars on one to three sides they made excellent extended family homes with many rooms.

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## And another mystery.....

Dr Francesco Tiradritti recently gave a lecture for the EES at the Antiquaries in London. He was talking about the amazing tomb that he has been working on in the Asassif for many years. He said that they had recently found evidence of the removal of sections of decorated tomb wall during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and its immediate aftermath. The removal of the limestone wall facing was not done in a way associated with the Qurnawi, and they found artefacts left by the 'tomb robbers' from which it was sensible to deduce that the work was done by men from the British Army using Italian prisoners of war as labour!

One *saff* was blown up by the French with as many of its inhabitants as could not get away. Only one recent historian appears to have noted this. But where was it? And who lived there? The Hasasna, until recently on Dra abul Naga, was settled by some Khasas from the Saff el Khasasiya, and the people from Ghabat had come from Saff el Bagara. Such a catastrophic event must live on in the community memory.

Only some in-depth interviews might find clues, and probably more, in the oral history. That work, and much more, urgently needs to be done before the older generations die.

It has always been said that the major period for destruction of the tombs was during this World War II period, and it was said that this was Qurnawi work. This was used as a reason for the post-war relocation of Qurna and the partially realised plans by architect Hassan Fathy for New Qurna. It is fascinating to think that it might not have been Qurnawi who caused such damage, but the British with Italian help. Could history repeat itself so closely?

If you have any further knowledge of British Army personnel and Italian prisoners of war in this area, please do get in touch.



## The Qurna History Project/ Qurna Discovery link.

One small panel has been made for the zawyeh about the Qurna History Project. Amongst other things, it illustrates the joyful occasion in 2001 when we had a tea party to celebrate the introduction of Yvonne Neville-Rolfe—descendent of Joseph Bonomi and now Chair of the Friends to the descendants of Bonomi's old friend Sheikh Awad. The panel also asks for help in locating old photos and any other 'old' information on Qurna and the Qurnawi.

Caroline Simpson co-ordinates the QHP. Now that the exhibitions have been relocated, and the Friends organisation formed, it is hoped that the long-term aim of writing a book will become the priority.

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## It's a strange world...

In June 2007 Dr Hawass wrote an article for Al Ahram the Arabic daily newspaper. Entitled '**Qurna.... A history which shall not die**' it mentions the research, and used much of the information collected by the Qurna History Project when describing Qurna's recent history. It is very good that such historical information becomes better known, but somewhat strange that the very existence of the research appears to be being used as one reason for the acceptability of the large-scale demolitions following relocation.