



*Barbara Adams, friend and colleague
(19 February 1945-26 June 2002)*

Starting our working lives in the Natural History Museum we shared important parts of our youth, of growing up in a new world of post-war London, products of its free education, independent woman in a once male-dominated professional world. We were respected for our capabilities. Barbara made the most of hers. She became Curator of the Petrie Museum at University College, London.

Barbara was a perfect curator. The collections came first. She prepared, conserved, documented, and published them without judgement. Thus her catalogues, "Ancient Hierakonopolis" (1974), "The Fort Cemetery at Hierakonopolis" (1984) and "Ancient Neken" (1990, 1995) are a testament to the skill of those who manufactured the artifacts, the excavators and conservators, in sum to the objects themselves.

Whilst others were taking of setting up support groups to publicize and help fund the Museum Barbara had founded, in 1988, "The Friend of Petrie Museum"; brought in a loyal and valuable band of volunteer helpers; and written three popular books, "Egyptian Momies", "Predynastic Egypt" and, with Krzysztof Cialowics "Protodynastic Egypt" for Shire Publications.

But the first publication, in 1964, was a book of her own poems "Bones of my Soul" and I think that it was a poet in her that made her observations so acute and her writing so succinct. Her observations were evidence based not theory driven. So her writing will endure as documents of her own excavations and those of others. This does

not mean that she did not offer her insight into why things were as they are in different cultures and times.

“From Palaeolithic times man began to develop a dread of death and to believe in an afterlife”. Of course that is why we have the wealth of artifacts and mummification of Egypt.

The restoration of pots was one of Barbara’s skill – had she acquired this skill repairing fragmented skull at the Natural History Museum? The observation of shape and form certainly made her an expert in ceramics to be sought out – by Michael Hoffman who asked her to work with him in Hierakonpolis, that great city once capital of Late Predynastic Upper Egypt. In the event she was to publish his excavations and, with Renee Friedman, take on excavations there herself. Knowing the site so well she inevitably selected a crucial area to excavate and settle a dating issue. I joined her as anthropologist and she was a joy to work with. Thus emerged the elephant burial, the dogs, baboons, cattle, as well as the ceramic mask which has her implish grin and defies you to suspend belief.

Her work is not finished. “Living Images at the Petrie Museum: Mummy Portraits published in Honour of Barbara Adams” will be published by the Friends and edited by Stephen Quirk. The exhibition in 1997 “Ancient Faces” at British Museum allowed us to superimpose portrait on skull from the same mummy only to discover the portraitist’s skill: the eyes look straight ahead for dramatic effect while the lower faces is turned slightly for greater charm and aesthetic effect – that was Barbara: she looked you in the eye and charmed you.

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