

MINUTES FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING FOR THE PALESTINE EXPLORATION FUND, 13TH JUNE 2024

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting, 3rd July 2023, having been previously published on the PEF website, were taken as read, and there being no corrections, the Chairman proposed that the AGM accept them as a true record. The motion being carried, a hard copy of those Minutes was signed by the current Chairman, John MacDermot, to be kept on file at the PEF office.

2. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND REPORT

The Chairman of the Fund, John MacDermot, welcomed members to the AGM. He had a specific welcome to Dr. Paul Collins, the PEF's new President, who had accepted the role on the death of Jonathan Tubb. Dr. Collins was also Jonathan's successor as Keeper of the Department of Middle East at the British Museum, and his role continues the close and historic association between the PEF and that institution.

Report

Over the last year, I have been privileged to serve once again as one of the officers of the PEF. During that time, we have witnessed the appalling conflicts in Israel/Gaza and Eastern Ukraine. The human tragedy has been accompanied by economic turmoil, hunger and political instability in many parts of the World. Inevitably there have been consequences also for charities in the UK, which have had to cope with rising prices and other inflationary pressures, travel restrictions, and diversion of government funds away from cultural and educational activities.

Notwithstanding such pressures, I am pleased to report that the financial state of the PEF remains quite strong. Our treasurer, Amy Hitchcock, has been ably assisted as always by the administrative team of Ivona Lloyd Jones and Valentina Prunas, under the watchful eye of our Chief Executive, Felicity Cobbing. A detailed account of the PEF finances forms no part of the present report, but members will wish to know that at the completion of our move from Hinde Street & Mews to Greenwich in December 2018, our total funds (investments and cash holdings) added up to a little over £4,310,000. At the end of April this year, the balance was over £5,211,000. Furthermore, during that time much of the interest from the investments was used for the running expenses of the organisation. Those involved deserve our warmest thanks.

We have seen many important developments in the PEF during the last few years, none more than how the PEF presents itself and is seen by both the academic world and the wider general public. Many of the greatest achievements of the PEF in previous times, including particularly the mapping of Western and Eastern Palestine and the Negev Desert, were undertaken in collaboration with the War Office by the Ordnance Survey. The PEF has never felt a need to apologise for its links with Britain's colonial past, but attitudes have changed, and the PEF has established a Decolonisation Subcommittee (chaired by Ava Clark), which has a brief to review how its activities in the Middle East should be taken forward in the future in a way that reflects and strengthens Britain's role to enhance cultural exchange in more enlightened times.

Similarly, the PEF Executive Committee has initiated a programme led by our Hon. Secretary (Ray Bruce), Richard Hills and other committee members to review how the PEF presents itself to the wider public. Our principal Articles of Association have changed little since 1865 and the present document (June 2019) makes it clear that much of the focus of the PEF should be to promote the education of the public in the history, archaeology and a wider understanding of the Middle East. To do so today, the organisation must present itself in new ways, taking account of how schools, colleges and other organisations will perceive us as a reliable source of information. Such information is now distributed through websites, blogs and numerous social media outlets. Activities of this sort require experience and considerable expertise, and the challenge for the PEF is to ensure in the years ahead that we continue to develop an informative outreach programme in parallel with any detailed plans for educational activities and materials.

The PEF continues to maintain a remarkable reputation among those in the museum and university worlds. Much of the credit for this is due to the Editor of our Journal (Charlotte Whiting) and the Chairman of the Publications Subcommittee (Daniel Reynolds) and the many who work with them. We owe them all our particular thanks.

I would like to close with a word of thanks to our devoted Committee members, staff and volunteers, who between them keep the show on the road, and of course to offer a very warm welcome to our new President, Dr Paul Collins, who will be known to many of you in his role as Keeper of the Middle East Department at the British Museum.

John MacDermot

3. HONORARY SECRETARY'S REPORT

It has been a challenging year for the PEF and a very sad one with the death of our illustrious President, Jonathan Tubb. May I take this opportunity to convey my deep, personal sorrow. It was his collaboration on an important and successful TV series on the Bible and archaeology that gave me the privilege of working with a man of considerable

wisdom and humanity. I have to say his enthusiasm did much to encourage my own interest in archaeology. Because of Jonathan, I was introduced to the engaging story and archive of this unique organisation.

The year was also marked by the distressing situation in Gaza, still unresolved. I know our politically neutral PEF had to wrestle with a response. Understandably there was a great deal of soul searching and discussion of what to say. We should be proud of the final wording that Felicity put together with the support of Linda Hulin. These statements can be found on our website and in an editorial in the PEQ. It would be remiss of me if I did not mention Yasmeen El-Khoudary who with her first-hand knowledge of what was actually happening in Gaza made us profoundly aware of our responsibilities in the wording of our statements.

Given Felicity's absence due to the illness and death of Jonathan, I must commend the hard work of staff above and beyond normal duties. Kudos to John MacDermot and Avantika Clark in particular for keeping a steady hand on the tiller with the support of the rest of the team. Time was given over to supporting me in terms of my Hon.Sec apprenticeship for which I will be eternally grateful. Thank you Felicity for being at the end of the phone when needed.

Staff Reviews

Felicity's absence meant staff reviews were unavoidably delayed. I am pleased to report all were held in early November once she returned to work, with the exception of Yasmeen El-Khoudary who sadly handed in her resignation at the PEF. Yasmeen is personally and directly impacted by events in Gaza and felt she could not continue working at the PEF in the role of Social Media officer. We wish Yasmeen and her family the very best for the future. Her unique experience and knowledge of the region will be very difficult to replicate. As part of my apprenticeship, Felicity generously allowed me to have my own informal discussions with Avantika Clark, Ivona Lloyd-Jones and Elisabeth Sawerthal undertaken on my regular weekly visits to the office. These discussions proved extremely helpful in understanding the problems and possibilities of their roles given the particular challenges posed by events and what the future may entail if we look to engage more with the general public.

Staff Activities

Ivona has been joined by Valentina Prunas as administrative assistant. This had proved to be a difficult position to fill given the requirements of the job on a part time basis. Valentina appears to have settled in very well.

I am pleased to report that Ava has been promoted to Collections Manager, reflecting her real input on a daily basis to the care and management of the vitally important volunteer programme, technical know-how at lectures, and mopping the CEO's brow.

Following Yasmin's resignation, the post of Social Media Officer has been filled. Two volunteers, Benedict Turner-Berry and Sam Ashdown, are sharing this role. Ben is an ethnography PhD student at Cambridge University, focusing on the experience of sound in different Middle Eastern communities, and Sam is a first-class honours history graduate from the University of Greenwich. He is a well-known face to us at the office as he was a former intern at the PEF.

Our Librarian, Elisabeth Sawerthal, has moved back to Vienna and so the day-to-day management of the PEF library is now being undertaken by in-house staff and volunteers. Elisabeth has agreed to act as consultant librarian for book purchases, reviews, and library decision making. I am sure we will continue to have access to Elisabeth's wide range of knowledge and interests which in addition to her library expertise has benefited colleagues.

Our Annuals Copy Editor, and PEQ Assistant Editor, Penny Butler has retired for these positions. Her position at PEQ will be taken up by Elisabeth Sawerthal. The role of copy editor on the Annuals has been filled by Dr Rebecca Darley, Associate Professor in Global History, University of Leeds.

Databases. Due to Felicity's unavoidable absence, this project has been delayed. However, the library catalogue is ready to go on line in the near future. Other databases covering the smaller collections will follow in due course, before the larger collections (photographs, archaeological collections, documentary archive) are added.

Decolonising. In the light of the events of the last few months, we are currently reappraising our focus regarding our approach to decolonising. This does not mean the work we have already undertaken is curtailed. We want to expand our work in this area, to take advantage of nuanced discussion with for example student groups and lecture audiences. After spending some time researching and interrogating the origin story of the PEF, I believe we must shine our decolonising light on this crucial topic particularly as we would need to explain who we are and where our origins lay in our proposed outreach work engaging with the general public.

Great progress on the Mathers Project has been made, and the records pertaining to the PEF's archaeological collections have now been sorted and organised in a methodical way.

This is thanks to the efforts of our volunteers, particularly Max Schuman. Two new volunteers Bianca Eugenia and Geoff Cosson, now have the challenging task trying to match up these records and artefacts.

Last year, we reported that the PEF had submitted a grant project to the *Cultural Protection Project* for a project entitled *Developing Capacities in Marine Culture Heritage Management and Protection*. This was designed to train students from Libya and Gaza in marine cultural heritage projects, underwater surveying techniques and so on. We were successful in our grant bid but events in Gaza meant we had to rethink our plans. Having discussed the situation with colleagues in Palestine, Libya and Egypt, it was decided to proceed with the project, but redesigned to take into account the situation in which Gazan students find themselves. The Libyan section of the project is unaffected. Our decision to proceed was due to the passionate desire of students in Gaza to continue their education however best they can. We have always been mindful that this project is happening in the most extreme circumstances, and our reporting will reflect that. This project will be the focus of our attention in the forthcoming months. Our Grants Chair reports more fully on this important project.

Collections Acquisitions

The PEF recently took ownership of a collection of important photographs of Palestine and Transjordan dating to 1906 taken during a trip made by members of various American colleges. The donor, Janice Eyres, acquired the images at an auction in Manchester in the 1980s. The photographs are unusual in their subject matter, focussing as much on the people the travellers came in contact with as the sites they were visiting. There is also a focus on vernacular architecture. The photographs are of a relatively high technical standard, which is also somewhat unusual for this time period, when blurred images often outnumber the focussed ones.

Open Doors at the PEF

As many of you are aware I, along with others am keen to explore the problems and possibilities of opening the doors of the PEF to the wider general public. This is predicated on the assumption that the PEF has something to offer that would engage the interest of potentially new audiences. I have been developing educational material to fit current exam modules at GCSE and A-Levels within the history curriculum entitled 'The Road to Balfour' using the PEF archive. As my research has shown, education is in the very DNA of the PEF.

How do we respond to the question often asked of late, 'What has the PEF been doing since October 7 to help people better understand what is going on between Israel and Palestine?'

Opening the doors of the PEF to all potential markets will involve a clear understanding of who we are and how might we reach them. I thank Richard Hills for organising a thought-provoking brand workshop with a brand and marketing consultancy company to help determine possible 'direction' and a 'unifying voice' for the PEF brand. To progress, I will be circulating a brief questionnaire to trustees to elicit their thoughts on the Open-Door initiative. At the same time, we must look to practical issues of what might be achieved in terms of our available resources, not least financial. I want to thank those who are supporting this challenging initiative thus far.

Ray Bruce

4. HONORARY TREASURER'S REPORT

The PEF's finances have remained in a strong position despite another year of stagnant investment income levels and rising costs.

Although an overall deficit was predicted the team worked hard to create savings which has resulted in an improvement on expected financial performance. The team is also currently working on ways to generate new income streams to alleviate some budgetary pressure, for example being able to facilitate new ways of receiving donations via a portable card reader or the use of QR codes.

An exciting new income stream was awarded this year via a grant from the CPF (Cultural Protection Fund) for an overseas project being carried out through 2024 and the start of 2025. The grant covers some core PEF staff costs who will be working on the project so this facilitates some more cost saving to the PEF whilst also completing some exciting new work.

Although future finances are still unpredictable and further increased prices are expected, there has been some positive news in that the investment managers are predicting a 2% increase in investment income. Although small this shows signs of an improving market and a step in the right direction towards more financial stability.

Amy Hitchcock

5. HONORARY EDITOR OF THE *PEQ* REPORT

PEQ was published by Taylor and Francis in 2023/4 with Charlotte Whiting as Editor and Penny Butler and Adam Fraser as Assistant Editors. Elisabeth Sawerthal was the Reviews Editor. Penny Butler retired from her role at the end of 2023 and was replaced by Elisabeth Sawerthal. Each of the issues of *PEQ* 155 in June, September and December 2023 and *PEQ* 156 in March 2024 were published online and in print as scheduled.

Fifteen articles of high quality and wide interest were published in *PEQ* issues 155.2-4 in 2023 and 156.1 in 2024, as well as eight book reviews and four acknowledgements of books received by the PEF library with the help of the Reviews Editor. Six grant reports outlining research conducted by PEF's grant recipients were also included. Short notices, including news of Alan Millard's retirement from the Editorial Board of *PEQ* in Notes and News and an Obituary for the PEF's President Jonathan Tubb (1951 – 2023) by Rupert L. Chapman III, were also published. The March 2024 issue of *PEQ* also included a Guest Editorial on Gaza's cultural heritage and intellectual life by Felicity Cobbing and Linda Hulin.

PEQ achieved 31,943 downloads in 2023, which is a 37% increase compared to 23,316 downloads in 2022. Overall, this is a 111% increase compared to 2019's downloads (15,104), showing a continued growth in readership numbers over the past 5 years.

In addition, 2,771 institutions were able to access *PEQ* in 2023, which represents an increase from 2022, due to sale deals by Taylor & Francis in addition to *PEQ*'s traditional subscriptions.

In terms of citation metrics, *PEQ* received a 1.1 Citescore (Scopus) - up from 0.8 in the previous year – as well as an Impact Factor of 0.6 for the first time, placing it in the top 100 of journals in the archaeology subject category.

Regarding alternative metrics, *PEQ* was mentioned 67 times on social media in 2023, including Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. It also received 2 mentions in news outlets and blogs. The number of articles submitted remained stable, with most coming from Israel, the United Kingdom and the USA.

Charlotte Whiting

6. HONORARY CHAIR OF PUBLICATIONS REPORT

Volumes currently in production

Ophel volume (Vol. XIX)

The Ophel volume is now entering its final stages and is with the typesetters in Italy. There were a few minor issues with image scaling and resolution, which have slightly delayed the process, but these have now been rectified. The volume is on track for a late 2024, early 2025 release (waiting for confirmed date).

Turkowski volume (Vol. XXI?)

The full text of the Turkowski volume is now with Penny Butler and has been copyedited. Most of the images have also been submitted. DR has put Carol Palmer in touch with Taylor & Francis to discuss Open Access possibilities. This volume is scheduled to be the next in the series after the Ophel volume.

My thanks to both Penny and Felicity for their work on these volumes. They have been instrumental in getting both past the finish line.

Contracted volumes

al-Ghozlan: Excavation Project (Vol. XXI?)

James Fraser has now signed a contract for the publication of the Khirbet Um al-Ghozlan volume. This has been sent to T&F for approval and a timeline for production.

Khirbet Um

Under discussion

of Palestine Railways 1920-1948

_____ We are currently in discussion with Dr Walter Rothschild his recent work on the Palestine Railway and turning it into a PEF Annual. I hope to have more to report by the next AGM

The History

Tell Dothan

I have been in touch with Dr Ghassan Sa'id Nagagreh about his PhD thesis on Tel Dothan which he submitted to the PEF for consideration in the series. I am slightly behind with sending my comments to him about how to reshape his thesis as a volume for the PEF Annuals series. I have, however, written to Dr Nagagreh to reassure him that we are interested in publishing the work and to apologise for the delay.

Copyeditor role

Rebecca Darley (University Of Leeds) has agreed to take on the role of Annuals copyeditor after Penny Butler's retirement later this year. Rebecca is an experienced copyeditor and has kindly agreed to reduce her consulting fees by 50% for all work with the PEF. We are now waiting for final approval of her post from the Treasurers, with the view that Rebecca will begin her work with Vol. XXII of the series.

The PEF and I wish to sincerely thank Penny for her outstanding work on the series over the past few years. Penny has been instrumental to the workings of the Annuals, and she will be sorely missed. We also thank Rebecca for her generous offer to the PEF and for agreeing to take on the role.

Daniel Reynolds

7. REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE GRANTS SUBCOMMITTEE

General Matters and Membership

Jen Baird continued as chair. The committee now also includes Dan Reynolds, John Ritzema, Zeina Klink-Hoppe, as well as Ava Clark and Felicity Cobbing.

PEF Grants

The budget remains reduced this year at £6,000 due to the financial situation in the UK. Consequently, some difficult choices have been made to maximise the benefit of the PEF grants. We hope this situation will be short lived, and 2025 will see a return to previous funding levels. As in previous years, post research processing and publication costs are considered valid for these research grants. The PEF received 7 applications in 2024, with a total sum applied for of £12,748.81.

The total awarded in 2024 was £6,000:

- Mrs. Andrea Coffman, National Gallery of Art (Collections Manager, Dept. of Photographs): *Assessing the collection of photographic works by the Zangaki brothers and Frank Mason Good at the PEF*, £2000
- Prof. Bethany Walker University of Bonn: *Tracing the People and Lifeways of Ottoman Khirbet Beit Loya*, £2000
- Dr. Holly Winters, University of Sydney: *The Land Behind Aleppo: Urban Life and State Formation in Bronze Age Syria*, £2000

Grants will reopen in December 2024.

2023 PEF/Albright Institute Fellowship

Last year's awardee, was unfortunately unable to take up her fellowship due to the continuing conflict. We had suspended the fellowship for 2024 due to budget constraints, but as this funding was already allocated, we have decided to re-advertise this fellowship.

Routledge/Philip Davies Award

This award, which is funded by our publishers T&F (Routledge) was established to honour the contribution to scholarship and scholarly publication, of our Chairman, Philip R. Davies, who died suddenly in 2018. The award in its current format has had very slow uptake in recent years, because of the wait time between submission and publication in PEQ. A new model has been agreed with T&F that early career scholars who wish their submissions to PEQ to be considered for this award, should indicate so at the time their article is submitted to the journal. This way, we will be encouraging early career scholars in a more productive and efficient way.

Cultural Protection Fund application

In late summer 2023, we were awarded a Cultural Protection Fund grant for a project to train archaeology students from Libya and Gaza in the fundamentals of marine archaeological survey and recording. This project was developed by Dr's Georgia Andreou (Southampton university), and Dr. Julia Nikolaus (University of Belfast). In light of the ongoing conflict and its terrible consequences for colleagues in Gaza, the part of the project that was to take place in Gaza has of course had to be changed. We were eager to still utilise the funding to support our colleagues in the MENA region, so Felicity Cobbing, Georgia Andreou, and Julia Nikolaus have worked hard to adapt the project into something

deliverable in the current climate. That project, *Developing Capacities in Marine Cultural Heritage Management and Protection*, is now underway in participation with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in Palestine, the Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology & Underwater Cultural Heritage in Egypt, and the Department of Antiquities in Libya.

Jen Baird

8. ELECTION OF JOAN E. TAYLOR AND LOUISE MARTIN AS ORDINARY BOARD MEMBERS, TO SERVE FROM 2024 TO 2029
RATIFICATION OF CO-OPTION OF LINDA HULIN AS AN ORDINARY BOARD MEMBER, TO SERVE FROM 2024 TO 2029
RATIFICATION OF APPOINTMENT OF RAY BRUCE AS HONORARY SECRETARY, AND DANIEL REYNOLDS AS PUBLICATIONS CHAIR, TO SERVE FROM 2024 TO 2029

Ray Bruce announced the results of the postal ballot for the above elections. The elections and appointments were **Approved**. John MacDermot welcomed the new members to the Board.

9. APPROVAL OF THE ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS FOR 2023

Ray Bruce reported that there had also been approval in the returned postal ballots for the 2023 Report and Accounts. John MacDermot referred the members to the Annual Report and Accounts for 2022, copies of which had been sent by email to the membership in advance of the meeting. This document was also available for consultation in the PEF office.

The members present **Approved** the Report and Accounts for 2023.

10. APPROVAL OF AMMENDMENTS TO ARTICLE SOF ASSOCIATION TO ALLOW FOR AN ANNUAL INDEPENDENT REVIEW

Ray Bruce reported that the submitted postal ballots for this proposal showed approval for this measure. The members present **Approved** the motion. The PEF's Article of Association would be edited to reflect this change and the new document would be posted on the PEF's website. Henceforth, from the calendar year of 2025 onwards, if the PEF's financial circumstances allow, the Board will have the option of choosing to opt for an Independent Financial Review, rather than a full audit. It is envisaged that an Annual Audit will be conducted every few years.

11. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS FOR JUNE 2024 – JUNE 2025.

Ray Bruce reported the results of the postal ballot which were in favour of reappointing our Auditors, Hartley Fowler Llp for the forthcoming year.

John MacDermot proposed the appointment of Messrs Hartley Fowler as Auditors for the year June 2024 – June 2025. The proposal was **Approved** by the membership.

12. SUBSCRIBERS' QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (Questions submitted via email prior to the meeting)

Ray Bruce reported no questions had been submitted.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

John MacDermot asked if any of the members present had questions they wished to raise.

No questions were forthcoming, and so he closed the meeting. He thanked members for attending and voting, and continuing to support the PEF through their subscriptions and involvement. He thanked the PEF Officers and all Board members for their essential input during the course of the year. He also thanked the PEF staff, particularly Felicity Cobbing, for her excellent work in the preparation of the paperwork for the AGM.

14. DATE OF THE NEXT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The membership would be informed of the date of the next Annual General Meeting when it was known.

John MacDermot.