

# T. E. Lawrence Society Symposium 2016

**St. John's College, Oxford  
23-25 September 2016**

## Programme

### **Friday 23 September**

*Welcome from the chairman Philip Neale*

*The Strategic Context to the Arab Revolt*  
Roger Holehouse

Roger Holehouse OBE is a former Royal Navy officer and Foreign and Commonwealth Office civil servant. He is also a National Trust volunteer at Clouds Hill.

Roger will examine the shifts in British policy towards the Ottoman Empire from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until its dissolution in 1922. He will examine the reasons behind Britain moving away from supporting the Ottomans, as a buffer against Russian expansion, in the Crimean War, to a position of fighting against them, as an ally of Russia, and supporting the Arab Revolt, in the 1914-18 war.

*Views of An Antique Land: Egypt and Palestine During the First World War*  
Dr Steve Mills, Professor Paul T. Nicholson and Hilary Rees

Dr Steve Mills is a lecturer in archaeology at the School of History, Archaeology and Religion at Cardiff University and a specialist in auditory and sensory archaeology. He has worked in Egypt and has an established interest in landscape archaeology.

Professor Paul T. Nicholson is also at the School of History, Archaeology and Religion at Cardiff University where he teaches Egyptian archaeology and early technology. He regularly directs projects in Egypt and has an established interest in early archaeological photography.

Hilary Rees is the project officer for *Views of an Antique Land*. She is secretary to the Gwent branch of the Western Front Association.

This paper looks at a Heritage Lottery-funded project based at Cardiff University which is examining images of Egypt and Palestine taken during the First World War. The project will provide a website which descendants of those who served in the conflict can use to better understand the landscape and societies in which their ancestors served, but will go further by providing images of the archaeological sites and settlements as well as photographs of military subjects. These give a snapshot of Egypt and Palestine at this important period and should prove useful to archaeologists, historians and film makers as well as those researching military or family history.

*Accompanied by a small exhibition of ephemera from the project*

*Question and answer session with the day's speakers chaired by Philip Neale*

### *The Man with the Gold*

World premiere of a new play by Jan Woolf

Following on from the success of *The Oxford Roof Climber's Rebellion* in 2014, the Society is pleased to bring a new play to the stage at the 2016 Symposium. *The Man with the Gold* has been written by distinguished author Jan Woolf.

The British government is at war again in the Middle East and never before has an understanding of the historical dynamic linking the Sykes-Picot treaty at the end of WWI to the present been so vital. This play has been completed for the centenary of the Arab Revolt against Ottoman rule during WWI. Its intention is to unravel the complex "hero" it produced in T. E. Lawrence. Set in the present, it centres on two archaeologists as they prepare a centenary exhibition. As they unravel their personal connections, ghosts are summoned and the myth of "Lawrence of Arabia" excavated.

*Followed by a Q&A session with Jan Woolf*

## **Saturday 24 September**

*New Light on the Arab Revolt and the Forgotten Few Who Shaped It*  
Philip Walker

Philip Walker is a retired archaeologist who spent many years as an Inspector of Ancient Monuments with English Heritage. He is writing a book on his research, which grew out of a paper he presented at the 2010 Symposium. He has travelled in Libya, Palestine, Morocco, Xinjiang and other parts of Central Asia. He has a particular interest in the relationship between British Intelligence and the Arab Revolt.

New research into a key group of British officers based at Jeddah demonstrates that they saved the Arab Revolt from likely collapse before and during T. E. Lawrence's indispensable involvement. In particular, one officer's influence over the Revolt's leader, Sherif Hussein of Mecca, was at least as important as that of Lawrence over Emir Feisal. Without these efforts, the world would not have heard of "Lawrence of Arabia". This paper draws on research including private collections of photographs, letters, diaries and other documents. Philip discovered this material by tracking down descendants of officers in Panama, Jamaica, the USA, Canada, Australia, Ireland, Denmark and the UK. Many stunning photographs will be shown for the first time.

*Feisal and the Arab Revolt*  
Professor Ali Allawi

Born in Baghdad, Ali Allawi graduated with a BSc in civil engineering. He continued his postgraduate studies at the London School of Economics and obtained an MBA from Harvard University in 1971. He worked in finance and investment during the 1970s, and following an academic period at St Antony's College, Oxford, was appointed Minister of Trade of Iraq in 2004. In the same year he was appointed to be Iraq's first post-war Minister of Defence. In 2005 he was elected to Iraq's Transitional National Assembly and became Minister of Finance. Since 2006 he has been elected to different academic appointments around the world, appeared on many TV programmes and delivered numerous lectures related to Iraq. He has published many books and in 2014 his major political biography of Feisal appeared to great acclaim.

This paper looks at the type of states or confederation of states and political organisations that Feisal expected as an outcome of the Arab Revolt, Lawrence's perspectives on this, and the final pattern of states that did in fact emerge. One contention is that Feisal's vision was far more conducive to stability, security and prosperity in the post-Ottoman world than the failed mandate system.

*Seeing Arabia: The Personal Photographs of T. E. Lawrence taken between 1916 and 1918*  
George Thompson

George Thompson lives in the United States where he devotes his time to lecturing, writing and developing programmes on the First World War. After more than 25 years in higher education, as a university professor and assistant dean, he returned to academia as an Adjunct Associate Professor in the History and Philosophy of Medicine Department at the University of Kansas Medical Centre. Professor Thompson's knowledge of the war and his skill in programme development resulted in his being elected President of the World War Historical Association, Chair of the Midwest Chapter of the Western Front Association, US Branch, and serving as a member of the Academic Advisory Committee for the National World War One Museum and Memorial.

*Seeing Arabia* will examine a selection of wartime photographs taken by T. E. Lawrence. The images will be viewed from several contexts: geographical, chronological, historical, and as photographic objects. These approaches will reveal to us the man, his values and his photographic motives, and allow us to evaluate his effectiveness as a photographer. The presentation will place Lawrence in a larger context which was his era's use of photography as a tool to document one's perceptions and experiences.

*Seeing Arabia* will describe how Lawrence's pre-war life established his aesthetic and historical views that would influence his future choice of photographic content and techniques. It will also reveal why his images are not just a significant historical record but are elegant visual statements.

*T. E. Lawrence and the Red Sea Patrol*  
John Johnson-Allen

John Johnson-Allen went to sea in 1961 with the BP Tanker Company and spent nearly nine years at sea, rising to the rank of Second Officer. He then pursued a career in the property industry. Since retiring 10 years ago, he has gained an MA in maritime history and been elected a Liveryman of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and the Royal Institute of Navigation, Chairman of the Institute of Seamanship and a member of the Society for Nautical Research. He has written two previous books: *Voices from the Bridge* (with David Smith) and *They Couldn't Have Done It Without Us; The Merchant Navy in the Falklands War*. He lectures on maritime subjects and is researching for a fourth book.

Following extensive research into the activities of the ships of the Red Sea Patrol, it has become evident that without the work of those ships, the Arab Revolt would have failed and Lawrence would have remained an obscure officer in the military bureaucracy of Cairo. This paper looks at the work of the Royal Navy, largely unreported at the time for political reasons, using primary source material from the ships' logs and other early sources. Lawrence was aware of the importance and relevance of the Royal Navy in their Red Sea operations and commented on it on many occasions. He reported in 1918 that "the naval side of the ... operations, when the time comes to tell of it, will provide a most interesting case of the value

of command of the sea...” Until now, nobody has investigated what was behind those comments. This paper uncovers a new angle on the Lawrence legend.

*Question and answer session with the day’s speakers chaired by Pieter Shipster*

*Symposium dinner in St John’s College dining hall*

*Our after-dinner speaker is the Symposium’s opening speaker Roger Holehouse.*

## **Sunday 25 September**

*“Aeroplanes and Arabs”: T. E. Lawrence as Proponent of Air Power and the British Way in Warfare*

Group Captain John Alexander

John Alexander is a Group Captain in the RAF Regiment, the successor to the RAF armoured car companies formed to help garrison Iraq following the 1921 Cairo Conference, in which Trenchard offered Lawrence a commission. A specialist in air/land integration and an Arabic speaker, he served in the Falkland Islands in 1982; on secondment to the Sultan of Oman; at Tabuk on the Hejaz Railway in the 1990/91 Gulf War; in Iraq from 2003 to 2005; and in Afghanistan and Pakistan since 2011. He has conceptualised warfare in appointments in think-tanks at the RAF, Luftwaffe and the MOD. A graduate of Newcastle, the Open, Cambridge (as a Chief of the Air Staff Fellow) and Pakistan National Defence Universities, he was recently a Chief of the Air Staff Visiting Research Fellow at the Changing Character of War programme at Pembroke College, Oxford. He has published in the Royal United Services Institute Journal, Air Power Review and Asian Affairs.

T. E. Lawrence’s fame derived from the contrast between the warfare of the Arab Revolt and attrition of the Western Front. His conception of guerrilla warfare influenced Liddell Hart’s theory of the “Indirect Approach” and his cultural understanding is a totem for contemporary counter-insurgents. Yet in the ever growing Lawrence literature there is little linking his concept of warfare and his choice of Service for post-war enlistment. This paper uses archival research to argue that Lawrence and his colleagues employed a strikingly modern British “way in warfare”, using armoured cars, machine guns and aeroplanes to avoid Arab attrition and minimise British presence, and Britain’s economic and maritime strength to subsidise proxies and provide operational mobility. It concludes that this example of liberal militarism throws light on Lawrence’s support for air control in Iraq and enlistment in the RAF.

*Colonel Newcombe and Lawrence: Beyond Arabia*

Kerry Webber

Kerry Webber is a writer, photographer and designer who has spent many years travelling and working in the Middle East. He became interested in the Arab Revolt and Palestine Campaigns of the First World War which brought him into contact with the legend of Lawrence of Arabia. Intrigued by Lawrence’s claim that fellow officers could “each tell a like tale”, he began to explore those peripheral figures and decided to research the life of Stewart Newcombe, publishing articles and giving lectures on his findings. In 2000 he joined the T. E. Lawrence Society and was elected to its Committee, sitting on its editorial panel under the chairmanship of the late Philip Kerrigan. Kerry contributes biographies to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biographies. His book on Newcombe will be published in 2016.

Colonel Newcombe of the Royal Engineers was already a legend in the deserts of Arabia before he was joined in Cairo during the early months of the First World War by a group of extraordinary specialists in Middle Eastern affairs. One member of this group was T. E. Lawrence. Newcombe's story, like those of other unsung figures in the Anglo-Arabian theatre of war, has been eclipsed by the legend of "Lawrence of Arabia", and has languished in the dusty recesses of regimental records, government files or in the words of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. This paper explores the unique friendship between the two men, that began in a pre-war desert meeting south of Beersheba and endured for more than 20 years until Newcombe was at last able to describe Lawrence as being like a younger brother. At Lawrence's funeral, history records Newcombe as representing the Arabian years as one of the six pall bearers; this paper shows how much more this relationship meant to both men.

### *Lawrence of Arabia's War*

Dr Neil Faulkner

Neil is an archaeologist and historian who works as a lecturer, writer, editor and occasional broadcaster. He is co-director of the Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project in Norfolk and of the Great Arab Revolt Project in Jordan. Educated at King's College, Cambridge, and the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, he is a Research Fellow at the University of Bristol and Editor of *Military History Monthly*. The author of countless magazine articles and academic papers, his books include: *Apocalypse: The Great Jewish Revolt against Rome, AD 66-73*; *Rome: Empire of the Eagles*; and *A Visitor's Guide to the Ancient Olympics*. *Lawrence of Arabia's War* will be published by Yale University Press in Spring 2016.

Neil Faulkner was joint academic director of the decade-long Great Arab Revolt Project in Jordan. The discovery and interpretation of the archaeological remains have transformed understanding of the war in the desert in 1916-18. Neil will address four of the key themes:

- The way in which Lawrence's character as a Romantic and an Orientalist equipped him to play a unique role in the Arab Revolt.
- The rich interaction of tradition and modernity, symbolised by the camel and the train, during the war.
- The seminal contribution of Lawrence and the Sherifian Arabs to the development of modern guerrilla warfare.
- The way in which the evidence on the ground has confirmed the scale of the insurgency and the essential veracity of Lawrence's account in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

*Accompanied by an exhibition related to the Great Arab Revolt Project in Jordan*

### *The Boy in the Mask*

Dick Benson-Gyles

Dick Benson-Gyles was educated at Marlborough College and is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin. A professional editor and freelance writer, who has been writing for the *Western Morning News* for the past 25 years, he has also been an archaeologist in Iraq and TV documentary presenter. He lives in the South-West and has been a long standing member

of the Society. He is the author of a new book on Lawrence entitled *The Boy in the Mask; The Hidden World of Lawrence of Arabia*, due to be published in Spring 2016.

This fascinating presentation will explore Dick Benson-Gyles' quest to uncover previously unexplained areas in the life of T. E. Lawrence. The years of painstaking research have opened a completely fresh light on Lawrence's concealed private life. Following a journey to discover the man behind the many myths, the talk will explore a personal mission to reveal the man behind the mask: the secret Lawrence. Lawrence's lost Irish heritage will be explored - his father's real family (the aristocratic, Anglo-Irish Chapmans), his abandoned half-sisters (with evocative interviews), his illegitimacy, and his mother's obscure forebears. His concealment from his titled and wealthy Irish family affected Lawrence more deeply than previously thought; and a surprising truth emerges - that he thought of himself not as English but as Irish. We will also have an insight into some of the mysteries and questions still remaining around Lawrence and his life. The presentation will be supported by a wide range of unseen family and documentary photographs, never before published.

*Question and answer session with the day's speakers chaired by Alan Payne*

*The T. E. Lawrence Society Annual General Meeting*