

Well Met!

Friends and Travelling Companions of Rev. Thomas Bowles

Journals of Travels in
Egypt, Petra and the Near East, 1854

David Kennedy

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Almost fifty years ago, as preparation for a first season of fieldwork in Jordan and its subsequent publication, I undertook a search for accounts by scholars, visitors and travellers who had preceded me. Almost all of those had been published mostly in the well-known accounts by the great early western travellers – Burckhardt, Seetzen, Buckingham and a score of others referred to elsewhere in this book. For researchers, fifty years ago is not just half a century but a different world. The wholesale digitization of entire libraries and archives has been transformational. Many hundreds of pre-1914 published books and articles have emerged which were quite unknown to me in the 1970s and 80s but are now commonly freely available for instant download. Many ‘published’ works now digitized were privately printed ‘for family and friends’ and in very small numbers; those too have now been digitized. Then there are the archival deposits including unpublished journals/diaries and letters which are revealed through online searches and can often be accessed easily by purchasing digital copies.

Amongst the last of these is the journal of the Rev. Thomas Bowles. Three years ago, I was not even familiar with his name as someone who had followed the Long Desert Route from Cairo to Petra and on to Hebron and Jerusalem. At that point, my friend Andrew Oliver, specializing in American travellers in Egypt (Oliver 2014), and a wonderful source of information on those of them who went on to Petra and the Levant, drew my attention to an item in the online catalogue of a New York antiquarian bookseller. The selling price was beyond my own resources, but the Friends of the Library at the University of Western Australia (UWA) stepped in and purchased this ‘Diary’ for the library collection. Although I have access to the journal – as Bowles correctly calls it, an early task was to prepare a high-quality digital copy. It is from the latter – which can be ‘read’ on-screen enlarged as required, that the transcription was done. I am immensely grateful to Drew Oliver in Washington, Deanne Barrett, Travis Hearne, Rebecca Repper, Kirsty Nicholson and Alana Colbert all of UWA. Especially important has been the last of these – acting as a Research Assistant, Alana Colbert undertook the gruelling task over several weeks of ‘reading’ and transcribing the handwriting of Thomas Bowles. From my own many hours subsequently trying to identify place and personal names which were especially problematic and trying to read words and phrases that had defied her, I know how challenging the work was.

The next group of names are of those many people who provided significant information about the Bowles family, some of whom are descendants (albeit not of the unmarried Thomas). Four stand out – Caroline Cannon-Brookes, Tom Laporte, Lucinda Lewis-Crosby and Lisa Parkinson. In different ways each has been of immense help and to that I can add a special thanks to Caroline Cannon-Brookes who kindly hosted a visit to her home near Oxford and then arranged for a joint visit to several of the places associated with Thomas Bowles. Lisa Parkinson was equally generous with hospitality in her home and sharing family material about Henry Stobart. Associated with these ‘relatives’, is Crispin Powell, archivist of the Duke of Buccleuch’s papers who has been immensely helpful in providing information about the writings of the four men who set sail from Southampton for Australia in 1852 and arranged a very informative visit to Boughton House in 2022.

Thanks to the internet, it has often been possible to contact institutions and individuals far from my home in Western Australia. It has been immensely touching how swiftly and helpfully total strangers have responded. Most notable are those who trekked to a neighbouring church to photograph a wall plaque or search out a gravestone. More anonymous have been many others who – through the Find-My-Grave website, have supplied photos taken at my request. Finally, a few names deserve special mention: Gary Collins at Rugby School, Rev. Camilla White at Grafham, Terence Madigan at Camberley, David Galt in New Zealand, and Henry Warriner in Wiltshire.

Next are a swathe of friends who helped along the way: David Treloar, Julie Kennedy, Julie Kennedy-Pugh, Dawn Christenson, Norah Cooper, and Zbigniew Fiema

Lastly my wife. Veronica has been the classic supportive wife. By definition academics are more than a little obsessive even over matters of small interest to almost everyone else. She has been there to listen while I spouted excitedly details newly discovered of people of whom she had till that moment been entirely – and probably happily, ignorant. And she has been understanding when I found the need to work too many evenings and weekends and even during the night when insomnia provided further opportunity while everything was quiet. And of course she understands it is not ‘work’ – I have loved every minute of it and am well into my next book.

In selecting illustrations, I have tried to pick at least some of the roughly contemporary sketches, paintings or photographs of places and structures as they would have been seen by Thomas Bowles. (I wonder if he ever bought one of the sets of photographs of the Nile, or Petra or the Holy Land which were soon widely available in western countries). For Petra itself, I have a large selection of my own ground and aerial photographs to choose from. Having visited Petra many times and been flown into it to view the site and structures from a helicopter at a few hundred feet, I remain convinced it is the single most remarkable archaeological site I have ever seen. I can only suppose that when Thomas Bowles and his companions visited it, without the thousands of tourists and souvenir shops and hotels, the impression will have been greater still.

Introduction

Twenty years ago, the late Norman Lewis shared with anyone interested a typescript list of western visitors to Petra in the 19th century,¹ the basis of several articles/chapters he then published (Lewis 2003; 2004; 2007). In the years since then, hundreds of additional sources have emerged as discussed above. Although the list is just that, Lewis was well aware that the account published by – for example, Lord Castlereagh, of his visit actually involved several people besides his lordship. That is true of almost every visitor who wrote a surviving account whether published or a manuscript in an archive. The result is that the crude impression that several dozens or one or two hundred westerners visited Petra between Burckhardt in 1812 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 is a significant undercount. My current best guesstimate is that the true figure was probably nearer 2000, not counting the larger parties of tourists taken there by Messrs Cooke and Lunn. The much higher number matters for several reasons, most importantly for the impact so many westerners had on the societies they encountered and employed and on their economies. The regular requests to the Ottoman authorities and frequent complaints about the beduin lodged by so many westerners inevitably drew the former's attention to this lawless part of their empire and ultimately played a role in their assertion of control. Finally, the reports published by visitors of wonderful archaeological remains at Petra and elsewhere, stimulated exploration of the wider region of what is now Central and Southern Jordan and of publications devoted wholly to these remains (most magisterially Brünnow and von Domaszewski (1904-09)).

Each new discovery in some obscure and now defunct 19th century periodical of an account of a visit to Petra or of a manuscript – diary/journal or letters, or a collection of sketches or photographs, adds to our ability to analyse and interpret this phenomenon and its impact. Most of the people undertaking this journey were at least modestly well-to-do; some were very wealthy. All were rich by the standards of the native inhabitants they encountered. Most were people who otherwise made little impact at home whether in North America or Europe. Many are known only from their publication. Today, thanks to a plethora of family history tools, it is possible to flesh-out the writers and those they met along the way but who are not remembered for any publication or archival document.

Thomas Bowles is one of these latter. Even now with a far longer list of known visitors to Petra, his unpublished journal represents a welcome addition to the corpus. The process of getting to Petra and the experience of western travellers on this Long Desert Route and at Petra itself, was a constantly changing one. Bowles undertook the journey in March 1854, just 42 years after Burckhardt's re-discovery, and several decades before the Ottoman grasp on security and construction of the Hejaz Railway wrought a transformation on conditions for travellers.

The Bowles Journal is significant, too, for who he met along the way. Previously, most accounts provided names of fellow-travellers but, unless they were famous, could add little more. At first sight that is true of this Journal. The writer met numerous people and often spent a great deal of time in their company. He seldom identifies them beyond a surname. Family history

¹ My copy is annotated 'Updated 2004'.

tools have transformed our ability to identify and provide at least a simple biography. What emerges is a remarkable inventory of people of all kinds and nationalities from at least the travelling class of the mid-19th century: merchants and soldiers, tourists, etc. A wonderful cross-section of the professional and leisured classes on the move – business, pilgrimage, tourism, adventure. Hence the title of this book. As far as we know, this was by far the most important tour overseas Bowles ever undertook until an apparent return visit to at least Jerusalem in March 1868. Even today it would be regarded as a major undertaking – in 1854 it was a serious adventure and one involving considerable dangers for Bowles as for almost everyone he met along the way this would have remained a major landmark in their lives. Some of those who did publish accounts of their visit explicitly say they had been urged to do so by family and friends simply because of its remarkable novelty. It is unlikely Bowles had much subsequent contact with most of his travelling companions and others encountered. He may well have noted references to some of them in the press or other publications; it would be interesting to know if he ever purchased any of the accounts published soon after his own visit, not least that of Jane Eames who was his companion for more than a month. In a world in which obtaining information was so much harder than today, he may well have wondered what became of X or Y or Z: did they marry, have children, their careers and achievements. I like to think he would have been glad to read this book with its biographical notes on some many of those he met: gladdened in many cases but saddened elsewhere at how many died relatively young.

Included here is a wonderful random selection of people encountered in and along the periphery of the British Empire. A middle class and aristocratic selection by and large but there are unexpected exceptions such as George Badger (Ch. 4).

Identifying the People Bowles Met

In his two surviving Journals, only twice (Palmer and Coussmaker) does Bowles give their full name to any of the many people he met, even when they were together for lengthy periods. Indeed, despite having been friends since their shared time as students at Oxford, both Bowles and Stobart refer to one another in their writings by their surnames alone. A common practise at the time.

In the case of men, he usually omits formal title after the first mention: e.g. ‘Mr Strachan’ at first usually becomes just ‘Strachan’. If the title is a professional one - Dr, Major, Lord etc, he is more likely to retain it: e.g. Captain Hill he meets on the *S. S. Bombay* is almost invariably ‘Captain Hill’, spelled out in full. Women are always given their title - Mrs, Lady, the Duchess etc: ‘Mrs Rogers’ or ‘Lady Falkland’. Occasionally, usually with someone he does not much like, he may give them their title but no name at all: e.g. the ‘French Bishop’ who joined the *S. S. Bombay* at Aden or the ‘Irish priest’ met in Jerusalem.

‘British’ is never used as a nationality - his fellow-countrymen are all called ‘English’ even when he will have known some were Irish or Scottish. For other nationalities he uses just a broad term - e.g. ‘American’. For none does he say anything about where any of his companions originate or now live in their home country. Although he was surely conscious of significant differences between the accent, modes of speech and cultural views of Yeatman from Alabama and the Eameses from Massachusetts and New Hampshire, there is no hint of it in his journal.

Finally, he does not note that Rodewald, though American now, was a German immigrant, having seemingly shifted country as an adult and quite probably still distinguished by a German accent. We owe that piece of information to Jane Eames.

Although it is highly likely Bowles will have learned in the course of conversations over days, weeks or even months, a great deal about many of his companions, he evidently felt little need to record it. His lack of interest in the full names and antecedents of companions and acquaintances carries through in most cases to any *recorded* interest in what they were. Clergymen are (usually) identified as such and he notes that some of his companions are 'Dissenters' while the French Bishop is explicitly an 'R. C. Bishop'. Bryce is identified as a medical doctor but only in passing when he is called upon to treat an injury. Palmer is a famous writer so identified more fully as 'Mr Palmer - William Palmer of Magd(alen) College'. Although soldiers are identified by their military ranks he only once tells us their regiment: Captain Keane was an officer in the Ceylon Rifles. Most astonishing of all is 'Mr Kennedy', his close travelling companion for almost three months who is never given his full name; he characterises him as 'English' although Kennedy surely regarded himself as a Scot. We get only a chance hint of Kennedy's occupation and what he had been doing before they met on the ship from Galle (below).

As noted above, the *S. S. Bombay* probably carried about 45-50 passengers and Bowles mention 16 and provides a few details for some. Oddly, although Strachan was on the ship, he is never mentioned till they all reach Cairo. There was the potential to become well-acquainted with some and – in the case of Kennedy, to find him agreeable enough to subsequently spent two further months in his company. However, the reverse was also true and Bowles explicitly mentions trying to evade certain fellow passengers but how – in the confined space of a steamer and with – in this case, 14 days at sea, fellow-passengers could become tiresome. On 8th February 1854, his 10th day since Galle:

I walked sometime alone, shirking Miller, who altered his pace & tried to fall in with me, till at last I thought he would see I was avoiding him & so gave up my solitary & joined him & we walked together sometime. He went below & I was rejoicing in a solitary walk again, when it was again broken by Wood joining himself to me. And he staid walking with me till I went down to bed. It does not do to be selfish on board ship. One gets into the way of suiting oneself to any one & every one. It used to be torment to me to be with some people - there seemed to be a natural antipathy - but it wears off of necessity in travelling.

Although it is exasperating, we must remember that his Journals were being written for himself and without the need to explain or illuminate what would have been included in letters sent home (above). It need not surprise us that Bowles can be exasperating in his vagueness about people he meets and travels with; it would be useful to have some of his letters home for comparison. However, while his journal for this period frequently refers to letters received and his pleasure in them, he seldom mentions sending any: e.g. on Saturday 25 February 1854 he notes: 'wrote journal & finished my letter to Alice, besides writing a few lines to Tupper.'

And two days later 'Since then I have been finishing letters, ...'. In one case (Tupper's) it was not even a letter home but to someone he had met in Ceylon (below).

Once in Egypt Bowles could be more selective of his companions than on a crowded ship. Most notably almost all of the group of sixteen who arrived in Petra together had travelled with or near one another for weeks.

Thomas Bowles confided to his journal almost nothing about the people he met. And what people they were! Mostly British and American but mainly drawn from particular categories of the middle and upper classes – politicians, administrators of empire, soldiers, and businessmen; clergymen visiting the scenes of the Bible they had been steeped in and inspired by; people of all professions or ‘living on their own resources’, but turning their attention to serious amateur adventures. All will have been familiar with the Bible in a way not common today and many will have studied the Graeco-Roman Classics. Most had been privately educated and many had university degrees. Badger and Finn are unusual in their modest background.

Despite their haggling over prices and occasional exasperation with demands for ‘baksheesh’, they were prosperous enough to undertake this travel and by the standards of almost everyone they met, were rich ... and would return home to comfort and plenty after their adventure. Despite the privations of camping or poor hotels, these travellers will have seemed almost unbelievably wealthy to beduin or peasants looking at tents, camp furniture, clothing and lavish provisions of food and drink. Understandably their dragomen sometimes sought to win advantage by claiming their charges were great aristocrats.

Bowles surely learned a great deal of the back-stories of the people with whom he conversed for hours over many days at dining tables, while walking around the deck of a steamer or trudging across the desert. Sadly almost all of that is lost but our research tools today can unearth some of what Bowles may have known, more than he probably did not know and some of what became of these people in later years. A good – but rare example, is Bowles reference to Dr Gammie’s account of his shipwreck some years before but which we can flesh out considerably then follow his career and life after Bowles met him.

In later years, Bowles would have encountered in the Victorian media, some of those he had met – aristocrats, clergymen, politicians and soldiers in particular, but he probably never met them again in person. In many cases – especially the non-British or the British who lived overseas, he may never have even heard of them again. We are more fortunate and can construct at least brief biographies.

Some originally went to Egypt for their health, but even the Nile Valley could be deadly and the rigours of travel in the wider region surely impacted at least temporarily on the health of many. A few certainly died of within a few years (Tupper and Wakefield); others were killed or injured or their lives transformed in the Crimean War (Captain Butler), Indian Mutiny (Dr Gammie) and – even more convulsively, the American Civil War (Mr Yeatman).

Several married soon after the end of their travels; some married but had no children; and some – like Bowles himself, never married. Many of those who had children have descendants today and some – the landed gentry in particular, are traceable. Some were already notable people (the Falklands); others achieved renown of some kind in the years ahead (William Palmer); and others were the parents of people of prominence in later generations (Bryce);

some were the parents or grandparents of people who went to Petra in future decades (Bryce); and, half a century after the event, I discovered that one of the most influential and fondly remembered of my teachers as a student at the University of Manchester was the grandson of the German-American-British Charles/ Carl Rodewald who travelled to Petra with TB and wrote his name in charcoal on the wall of the Khazneh.

The circumstances in which his people ended their lives was very varied. Tupper, already seriously unwell for weeks, died at sea off Malta; Captain Butler was killed in the Crimea; Matilda Creasy was murdered four years after Bowles met her; and James Eames – a terrible sailor, died on shipboard entering harbour in Bermuda; Yeatman was killed by a train in 1910; and Bowles himself seems to have died soon after surgery.

Only eight of the 45 biographical sketches are of women and just two of the sixteen members of the Anglo-American Group with whom TB visited Petra were women. TB has little to say about the women he encountered but happily we have Lady Falkland's chapter on her visit to Palestine and – far more extensive and full of interest, are the published letters of Jane Eames. I suspect writings – if any, of Mrs Rogers, a 27 year old woman crossing the desert with her 45 year old husband whom she outlived by over 30 years, would have made interesting reading.