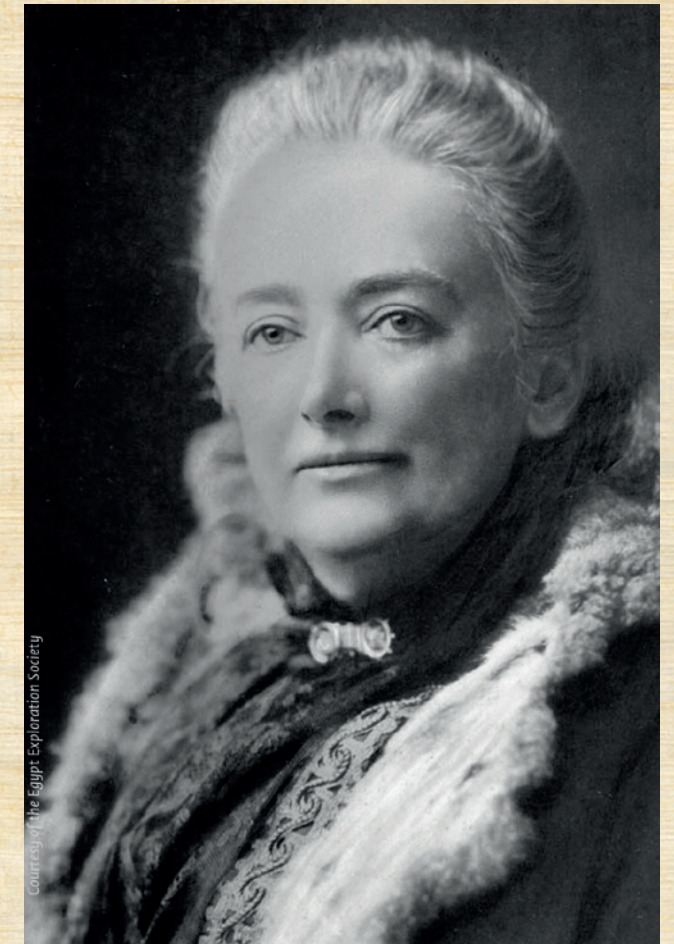




Amelia Blandford Edwards

1841 – 1892

Novelist, Traveller & Egyptologist



Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society

A dedicated campaigner

For the rest of her life, Amelia continued to work on behalf of the Fund. In one year alone she wrote 4,000 letters to possible supporters and members. She also wrote several learned articles in the press and travelled widely giving lectures about ancient Egypt. One of these lectures 'The Social and Political Position of Women in Ancient Egypt' explained how British women at the time had fewer legal and social rights than ancient Egyptian women. Her support for the rights of women led to her being made a Vice-President of the Women's Suffrage League in Bristol. In 1889 she was invited to undertake a lecture tour of America which was extremely popular. She gave over 100 lectures to various colleges and societies to raise funds. These lectures were later rewritten and published as *Pharaohs, Fellahins and Explorers* (1891).

Her final years

On her return to England, Amelia Edwards was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery. Even though she was exhausted and weakened after the operation, she continued to work. In January 1892, her close friend and companion Mrs Braysher died from influenza. Amelia also became ill and died just four months later on 15th April at Weston-super-Mare near Bristol. She was buried in the same grave as Mrs Braysher in the churchyard at Henbury. It is marked with an Egyptian obelisk and an ankh, the ancient Egyptian sign for life.

Her legacy

Amelia Edwards founded the first organisation dedicated solely to the excavation, recording and preservation of the sites and objects of ancient Egypt.

Over 130 years later, the Egypt Exploration Society is still supporting archaeological research projects throughout Egypt.



'the traveller on the Nile really sees the whole of Egypt...'

Her early life

Amelia Blandford Edwards was born on the 7th June 1831 in Islington, London. Her father was a retired army officer who had fought under the command of the Duke of Wellington. She was educated at home by her mother, and showed an early talent for writing, drawing and music. At the age of 12, the artist George Cruikshank offered to take her as a pupil. Her parents refused the offer, though Amelia later wrote that she had wanted to be an artist.

For the next seven years she trained as a singer, learned to play the organ and composed music. She later rejected a career in music, claiming that her teenage years had been 'virtually thrown away'. She turned instead to her third talent, writing. Amelia wrote stories and poems from a very young age and had some published in the popular 'penny magazines' of the time. As a young woman, she took a job as a journalist for the *Saturday Review* and the *Morning Post*.

She also began to travel, visiting Paris three times between 1853 and 1855. On the third visit she travelled more widely through France, Germany and Switzerland. She wrote her first novel, *My Brother's Wife: a life history*, around this time, which was published in 1855.



A new life in Bristol

In 1860, Amelia's parents died within four days of each other. She went to live with family friends, the Brayshers. When Mrs Braysher was widowed three years later, the two women set up home together at Westbury-on-Trym near Bristol. For the next ten years, Amelia carried on writing novels and short stories. The stories were published in magazines such as Charles Dickens' *Household Words*, and included some chilling ghost stories.

After recovering from illness, Amelia left home in 1871 for a visit to Switzerland and Italy. She then decided to go exploring in the Dolomites, off the tourist trail, with her friend Lucy Renshaw. Their travels here gave Amelia the inspiration for her first adult travel book, *Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys: a midsummer ramble in the Dolomites*. In 1873 Amelia and Lucy set off again, on a walking tour of France. Heavy rain slowed their progress and they decided to go much further south, in search of better weather. After considering a visit to Algiers or Malta, they finally decided on Cairo. This was to be a turning point in Amelia's life, which would lead her to a new career as an Egyptologist and lecturer.

A thousand miles up the Nile

Amelia and Lucy were joined on their trip by an artist friend and his friends. They hired a houseboat or *dahabiyeh* and sailed up the Nile. Travelling at their own pace they could spend as long as they liked visiting sites. They even excavated a small temple that they had discovered. Amelia had been commissioned by her publisher to write a book about the holiday, in the same style as *Untrodden Peaks*. It took her two years to research and write the book, *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* (1877).

Preserving ancient Egypt

The book included a great deal of carefully researched information about the sites visited and the culture of ancient Egypt. Amelia believed that travellers could not understand and appreciate what they were seeing, if they did not know the history behind it. The thorough research she did for the book, and afterwards, meant that she became an expert in Egyptology and could read hieroglyphs.

She criticised the looting of ancient sites to provide souvenirs for tourists. Indeed, Amelia had bought some herself before realising the damage this trade was doing. In her collection at home there were two mummified Egyptian heads (which were kept in a wardrobe) and mummified hands and feet in the library. Amelia realised that the destruction of ancient sites was due to the lack of any controls on excavation and tourism. On her return to England she was determined to do something about it. In 1882, Amelia and Reginald Poole of the British Museum co-founded the Egypt Exploration Fund (the name was later changed to the Egypt Exploration Society in 1919). Wallis Budge, Curator of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum, said that the founding of the society was down to the 'energy, enthusiasm and zeal' of Amelia Edwards.

The aim of the new society was to promote and finance a more careful approach to excavation and the publication of detailed site reports, working with the Department of Antiquities in Egypt.

