

INDIRAN

The newsletter of the Ancient India and Iran Trust

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Photo Credit: Anna Collar



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Editor's Letter

News from the Ancient India & Iran Trust

WELCOME to the seventh edition of the Ancient India and Iran Trust's newsletter, *INDIRAN*.

2012 has seen a few changes at the Trust: I returned from maternity leave in June, and we are delighted that Jo Salisbury, who did a marvellous job in my absence, has joined the Trust as Assistant Librarian. She works Mon-Thurs, 9-1. Our long-standing Assistant Librarian Jose John now works on Friday, 9.30-1.30, and is available to open the library by appointment in the afternoons. Cathy Pickett continues to do a fantastic job cataloguing - thank you very much Cathy! We have also appointed another new Trustee, Professor Julius Lipner (Divinity, Cambridge), who we hope to interview for the next issue of *INDIRAN*. This issue, you can find the **interview with new Trustee Dr Cameron Petrie** (Archaeology, Cambridge) on **pages 4-5**.

We've also held some exciting events: on the 12th October we celebrated the publication of **Raymond and Bridget Allchin's memoirs, *From the Oxus to Mysore in 1951***. Trustees Almut Hintze and Sir Nicholas Barrington have overseen the production of the book, and it is a beautifully illustrated and often thrilling account of an extraordinary year. The launch event was marked by a talk from Trustee Richard Blurton, keeper of the Indian Collection at the British Museum, one of Raymond's former students. You can find a review on **page 6** and can buy a copy from the Trust, or from Amazon.com.

In November we hosted another travelling photographic exhibition, on loan from the British Library, *Islam, Trade and Politics Across the Indian Ocean*; we have been part of Cambridge's annual *Festival of Ideas* (see **report on page 7**); we have had many fascinating lectures; we have seen the Omar Khayyám rose in the garden blossom; and we have seen the blooming of Marti Wilson's project to digitise her late husband's Sri Lankan photographic archive (see **right**).

Finally, **page 8** has pictures of the 2012 garden party, information about the beautiful new chairs in the India Room, and details of upcoming events. Enjoy this issue - and please get in touch if you have a story or information you'd like to share.

Anna Collar, Editor

Sri Lanka: Photo Archive of the Resplendent Land Online!

MANY OF YOU will recall the wonderful project that Mrs Marti Wilson has been undertaking - sorting through and digitising the slides of Sri Lankan art, artefacts and landscapes taken by her late husband, Professor Howard Wilson. Marti presented her work in progress at the 2009 Sri Lanka Study Day held at the Trust; the event and Marti's project were reported in Issue 4 of *Indiran* (summer 2010). All her hard work has now come to fruition - we are delighted to announce that the Howard Wilson Archive is live online and accessible via the Trust's website - <http://www.indiran.org/HW/>!

The Archive comprises photographs taken by Professor Wilson during the family's stay in Sri Lanka in the 1980s and 1990s. There are extraordinary shots of religious art pieces, such as sculptures of the Buddha from Aukana; shrines, including details of the Moonstone at the entrance to the Queen's monastery in Anuradhapura; social documentation, such as the pilgrimage to Adam's Peak; as well as valuable photographs of museum pieces from around the world, such as the great statue of Tara in the British Museum, or the intricately carved ivory chests, often held out of public view in museum storage, because of a lack of display space. However, possibly the greatest achievement of the Archive is the fact that it makes available the many photographs of cave paintings: many of these have been destroyed in the intervening years, whether by vandalism or atmospheric conditions.



-Photo Credit: Howard Wilson

Marti has worked tirelessly (or as she modestly suggests, in spurts between tea and biscuits!) at the project and produced a fitting testimony to Howard's vision in the 1970s of a digital future: "The day will most certainly come when all archives and museums have their collections photographically catalogued using video

THE TRUST'S GARDEN has a new addition: the beautiful Rose of Omar Khayyám, given by the joint Chairs of the Friends, Bill Martin and Sandra Mason, to commemorate the celebration events that marked the 150th anniversary of Edward FitzGerald's translation of the *Rubáiyát* in 2009. Two books on Edward FitzGerald and the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám, resulting from these celebrations, have just been published: one of which was edited by Bill and Sandra and featured in the last edition of *Indiran* (Spring 2012). This June, their Omar Khayyám rose was in full bloom: it is a delicate pink, with a heady scent - and features on our front cover.

Aside from being a thing of great beauty and subtlety in itself, the rose has an extraordinary, legendary history. The rather improbable story goes that the flower we have today was propagated from a rose



Photo Credit: Bill Martin & Sandra Mason

that had been planted by the Omar Khayyám Club in 1893, on Edward FitzGerald's grave in the churchyard of St Michael and All Angels (above), a church

technology". The Trust is very pleased with the result, and we are grateful too to Bryce Mildenhall for all his work delivering the digital aspects of the project. In her usual way, Marti has also expressed the desire for this archive not to be a static space - there is room for additional slides, notes, comments, and information - so, have a look and let us know what you think.

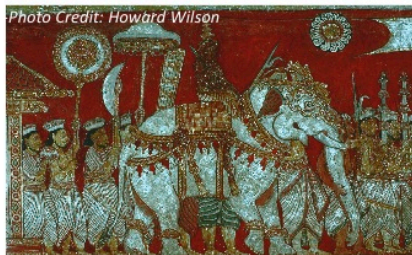


Photo Credit: Howard Wilson

The Rose of Yesterday

A Short History of the Rose of Omar Khayyam

already in 950, and of which parts date to the 1300s, in Boulge in Suffolk. More than that, the seeds of the same rose had been gathered by William Simpson, 'artist-traveller', from a plant at Omar Khayyám's tomb in Nishapur, Khorasan, brought back and raised at Kew Gardens in London. It's a hypnotic tale, linking mediaeval Persia and Victorian England, creating a poetic thread between a rose gracing a modern garden and the ancient deserts of north-east Iran. But how strong is the connection between the rose in our garden and the tomb in Nishapur?

In FitzGerald's Preface to his first version of the Rubáiyát, he recounts a tale told by Nizami Aruzi, a pupil of Khayyám's: "I often used to hold conversations with my teacher, Omar Khayyám, in a garden; and one day he said to me, 'My tomb shall be in a spot where the north wind may scatter roses over it.' I wondered at the words he spake, but I knew that his were no idle words. Years after, when I had chanced to reach Nishapur, I went to his final resting-place, and lo! It was just outside a garden, and trees laden with fruit stretched their boughs over the garden wall, and dropped their flowers upon his tomb, so that the stone was hidden under them."

Fruit trees then, but a rose? Perhaps, perhaps not - and could a rose plant survive the thousand years or so between the death of Omar Khayyám and that of Edward FitzGerald? The historical Omar Khayyám lived between 1048-1131. He

was an astronomer, philosopher, and mathematician. There are also many verses collected under the name of Omar Khayyám, though experts doubt whether the historical Khayyám actually wrote most or indeed, any of them. The Rubáiyát is a set of two-line verses (four half-lines) rather mistakenly called "Quatrains", attributed to Omar Khayyám, which provide an exposition on themes of mortality, temporality, fame, and

wine. Edward FitzGerald is widely credited with bringing the beauty of verse and thought in the Rubáiyát to a western audience with his interpretations, which first appeared in 1859. The illustrated versions published subsequently are full of elegant pre-Raphaelite ladies, skeletal reminders of man's temporal nature, mystical symbols, and, of course, roses (see left).

This reflects the fact that the rose is a regularly used visual device and metaphor in both the Persian and the English versions of the poem. The nightingale cries to the rose in quatrain VI (FitzGerald's First Edition), both reminders of the fleeting song of summer, youth, and life itself - and the image of the blowing petals of the rose appears again and again:

*'Look to the Rose that blows about us -
"Lo, / Laughing," she says, "into the world
I blow: / At once the silken Tassel of my
Purse / Tear, and its Treasure on the
Garden throw."' (quatrain XIII);
'Oh, come with old Khayyám, and leave
the Wise / To talk; one thing is certain,
that Life flies; / one thing is certain, and
the Rest is Lies; / The Flower that once has
blown for ever dies.'* (quatrain XXVI);
and *'While the Rose blows along the River
Brink, / With old Khayyám the Ruby
Vintage drink: / And when the Angel with
his darker
Draught /
Draws up to
thee - take
that, and do
not shrink.'*
(quatrain XLVIII).

It is only right, then, that Khayyám should have a rose named for him. Roses can live for a century or so - and famously, the rose on the apse of the cathedral of St Mary in Hildersheim, Germany, is reputed to be a thousand years old - so we have a tantalising possibility that the rose of Omar Khayyám in our garden could be a descendant of the original rose on his tomb. However, the tomb of Khayyám

itself is rather changed from the description by Nizami. American artist Jay Hambridge painted the tomb at some point prior to 1911; he shows a grand turquoise-domed mausoleum

with frontispiece, and scholarly men walking through a low garden full of roses (see illustration, left). A contemporary account of a visit by Professor A V Williams Jackson indicates that Khayyám's tomb was actually in one of the side arches of the mausoleum, dedicated to Imamzade Mohammad Mahruk. Omar Khayyám's tomb has since been moved and it is today a national monument to his all-round genius, a 1963 mausoleum in an Islamic style, an angular arch of geometric forms and blue-glazed tiles, with a star-studded dome and a very plain tomb below (see photograph above). Although there are roses and other flowers in the formal garden that surrounds the tomb, no thousand-year old rose tree, caught by the north wind, scatters its petals across his grave.

The north wind blows across East Anglia, however, and, even if the roses at FitzGerald's grave are more recent additions, perhaps it is, after all, the symbol that matters. The rose petals from Omar Khayyám's tomb blow down through the centuries, carried by the wind of scholarship across thousands of miles: here, in the depths of quintessential English countryside and in an ancient English church, lies a man who stepped through the years and brought the flowers of Omar Khayyám to the West. Glorious, exotic, distant Persia, united with quiet, rural Suffolk. This is the somewhat inconclusive tale of the Rose of Omar Khayyám.

Anna Collar

