The Egypt Exploration Society and Forming Material Egypt: notes for the future

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The discussions at the Forming Material Egypt conference, of which The Egypt Exploration Society was a co-sponsor, brought together archaeologists, historians, conservators, teachers and many others whose work, broadly speaking, could be said to have the aim of helping to ensure the survival in the long-term of the material legacy of Egypt’s past.

This aim is central to the Society and its work. The EES was founded in 1882 by Amelia Edwards, a writer and traveller, as a response to the rapid destruction of Egypt’s ancient sites and monuments which she had witnessed during a visit to the country in 1873. She established the Egypt Exploration Fund to excavate and record these sites with the cooperation of the Antiquities Service to the highest scientific standards of the day. The results were published and circulated to subscribers and the wider public, raising awareness of what stood to be lost, generating support for the cause and creating a record of the physical remains that would endure. The Society’s mission remains almost unchanged to this day.

The intention of the organisers was to continue and extend dialogue between the various individuals and organisations working to preserve Egypt’s heritage, and particularly with those based in Egypt; to identify the most important issues and biggest challenges, and to discuss practical and realistic approaches to tackling them.

The revolution of January 2011 has brought Egypt to the attention of the world but for once the usual stereotypes — Tutankhamun, camels and pyramids — have had little to do with it. Rather, the world has come to see a more modern Egypt and its vibrant, youthful people, determined in their desire for change and to have a say in their country’s future. The issues that led to the revolution and the difficulties that have followed it are the context in which