

# DEVON & EXETER INSTITUTION

## DEVON AND THE MIDDLE EAST, 1600-2016

The early proprietors of the Devon and Exeter Institution (founded in 1813) acquired the best books on history, geography, travel and religion of which 130 titles relate to Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, Iran and Afghanistan, and Palestine and the Holy Land.

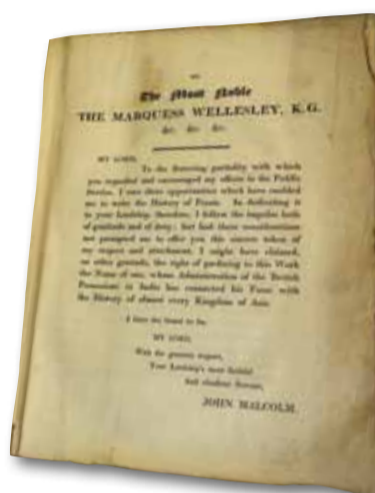
These titles include some of the most beautiful and influential books of the early Nineteenth Century, such as Belzoni's *Narrative of the operations and recent discoveries within the pyramids, temples, tombs, and excavations in Egypt and Nubia and the accompanying volume of Plates* (London, 1820) and Burckhardt's *Travels in Nubia* (London, 1819) and *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (London, 1822).



Belzoni's 'Narrative' introduction



Drawing from Belzoni's 'Narrative'



From Malcolm's 'History of Persia'

There are many historically significant works on the Middle East, such as Malcolm's *History of Persia* (London, 1815) and Rycaut's *History of the Turkish Empire, 1623-1677* (London, 1680) and *History of the Turks from 1679* (London, 1702).

Using the Institution's books, this exhibition reflects Britain's continuous but ever-changing relations with the Middle East and North Africa over four centuries, with particular reference to Devonians and residents of Devon. The first phase from 1600 to about 1720 shows how people from these isles were subjected to the might of the Ottoman Empire and powerful navies of the Barbary States. The second phase, which lasted until well into the twentieth century, was one of British commercial dominance and colonial expansion, while the third phase, which we are now living through, is one of multiculturalism, diversity and mutual respect.

### FIRST PHASE

The Ottoman Empire was the object of admiration, envy and fear for most Europeans who came into contact with it. These ambivalent attitudes can be found in scholars like the Topsham-born Simon Ockley, travellers like Ellis Varyard from Plymtree, near Cullompton, and the many thousands of Devon-born and Devon-based sailors and sea-voyagers who came into contact with the powerful navies of Algiers and Morocco, and ended up as slaves in Barbary, men such as Joseph Pitts and James Wyatt.



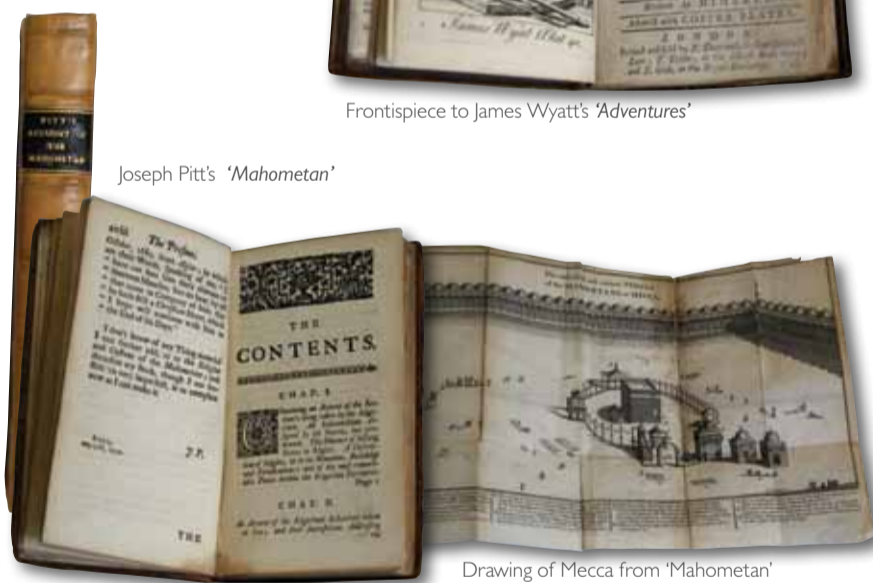
Frontispiece to James Wyatt's 'Adventures'

Simon Ockley's 'History of the Saracens'



Image of Mohammed from 'Saracens'

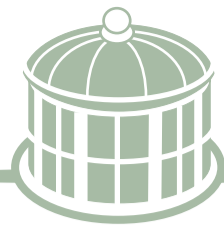
Joseph Pitts' 'Mahometan'



Drawing of Mecca from 'Mahometan'







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## SECOND PHASE

By the Eighteenth Century, however, British naval and commercial power had grown dramatically, while that of the Ottoman Empire had begun to decline, so much so that in 1816 Lord Exmouth of Canonteign House was able to destroy the once dominant Algerian navy, as described by eye-witness Abraham Salamé. British influence in the Middle East continued to increase throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so that by 1920, Britain ruled Aden, Cyprus, Egypt, the Sudan, Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq, as well as being the dominant power in the Gulf and southern Iran.

These changes are reflected in the many Devon personalities who had connections with the Middle East. Sir Samuel White Baker (1821-1893), who retired to Sandford Orleigh near Newton Abbot, was an indefatigable Nile Valley explorer, while Torquay-born Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890) ranged over three continents, exploring both Arabia and the source of the Nile, while Sir Redvers Buller, of Downes, near Crediton, was chief of staff on the unsuccessful Gordon of Khartoum relief expedition of 1884.



Sir John Bowring in 1826

Exeter-born Sir John Bowring, President of the Devon and Exeter Institution in 1860, made several journeys to the Middle East in the 1830s, visiting Egypt, Syria and Palestine, all of which he wrote about:

*“The Pasha gave us one of his vessels, the “Timash” (Crocodile), to convey us to Scanderoon (Alexandretta), and on our voyage we had strange evidence of the credulity of the Mahomedans. They enquired whether our European doctor had any marrow taken from dead men’s bones, which, it was reported, he used for ointment, as if so, being of evil augury, it must be thrown into the sea.”*

Extract from Sir John Bowring’s ‘Autobiographical Recollections’ en route to Syria in 1837



As for the early twentieth century, T. E. Lawrence - Lawrence of Arabia - who was part of the final flourishing of empire, and whose role in the Arabian campaign during the First World War is the stuff of legend, spent 1929 to 1932 at Cattewater near Plymouth, testing motor-boats for air-sea rescue.

T. E. Lawrence's in Arab clothing from the 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom'

Devon’s most celebrated woman writer, Torquay’s Agatha Christie, not only set many of her novels in the Middle East but also wrote a memoir of life in archaeological camps in Syria and Iraq, *Come tell me how you live* (London, 1946).

## THIRD PHASE

The Twentieth Century also saw a major change in attitudes, moving away from regarding the inhabitants of the Middle East as imperial subjects, with both scholars and travellers willing to accept both the region and its religions on their own terms.

A prime example is Eldon Rutter, a Londoner, but with many connections to Devon, who, in 1928, published a sincere, intimate and beautifully written account of his pilgrimage to Mecca. Similarly, scholars like Sir Thomas Walker Arnold (1864-1930), from Devonport and Professor Terence Frederick Mitchell (1919-2007) from Torquay brought a new sense of objectivity and empathy to Middle Eastern studies. This tradition has continued with the creation of the Department (later Institute) of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Exeter, the history of which can be found in Professor Jeremy Black’s recent study of the University, *The city on the hill* (Exeter, 2015).



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