

Report of the Annual General Meeting, March 8 2024, at the Union Jack Club, London

The date of the Annual Meeting was changed to allow for the appearance of Hany Salam (ESC 580), recently elected President of the Philatelic Society of Egypt, to show some of his outstanding collection. Despite the presence of a VIP speaker, however, there was again a sparse attendance, with only nine members present - five of them Officers - reflecting the long-term malaise that seems to be affecting all similar organisations. There were several appeals during the meeting for members - and especially those in UK - to make more effort to attend meetings, write articles, take part in the auctions, overall to boost the life-blood of the Circle.

Those attending were David Ogden (Chairman), Hany Salem, Mike Murphy (Secretary / Editor), Sami Sadek (Treasurer / Auctioneer), Neil Hitchens (Deputy Chairman / Webmaster), Jon Aitchison (Committee), John Clarke, Keith Nickol, Atef Sarian. Guest: Mrs Letty Nickol.

The Chairman welcomed members and guests, congratulated Hany Salam on his success in the election for President of our Cairo colleagues, and in his annual report lamented the long list of those presenting apologies. He noted the loss during the year of two senior life members in John Sears and Brian Sedgley. On the positive side, he announced that a regular schedule of meetings involving four by Zoom (two each hosted by the US and London) and four face to face in the UK had replace the haphazard programme caused by Covid and its aftermath. He hoped all meetings would be better attended and that members would come forward to share their collections by acting as speakers at the meetings. Especially welcome were recent Zoom meetings, now attracting about 20 members each; they are posted on YouTube.



Hany Salam... astonished members with his unique early Suez Canal markings and covers

The election of officers agenda item unfortunately drew a complete blank, with no member offering to take on any administrative role (but see below).

Reports from Hani Sharestan (Facebook co-ordinator), Trent Ruebush (US Agent), Tammie Aarron-Barada (US Zoom co-ordinator) and Paul Green (ESC 128), all of them offering suggestions about how to overcome the shortage of willing younger members, provided much food for thought, and the Committee will look in more detail about how some of those might be implemented. Officers thanked these members for their invaluable input.

Sami Sadek reported on Auctions 66 and 67, with 66 totalling 564 lots attracting £6,223 in bids (ESC commission £946) and total bids on 67, with fewer lots at 353, reaching £4,609 (commission £1,008). He thanked members for generous donations of lots and looked forward to larger auctions in the future.

As Treasurer, he announced an overall surplus for the year of £1,687.60, with the Auction commission some £1,000 higher than the previous year, in part offset by the fact that costs for our greatly enlarged schedule of meetings had exceeded 2022 by over £1,200. Printing and distributing the *QC* cost some £400 less than the previous year. Overall, our accumulated surplus stands at £26,979.88. The meeting passed a vote of gratitude to our accounts examiner, Andy Gould (ESC 393)

Neil Hitchens raised the spirits further by announcing that the recent series of Zoom meetings had been enormously successful, and thanks to the energy and the knowledge of Malcolm Coe (ESC 721), had been successfully transferred to YouTube for all to see. He revealed that plans for a new website based on a modern and more versatile platform were well advanced; he hoped to be able to show an early version in the very near future. With online tools like those provided by Wix or similar, we can optimize the site's visibility, ranking and online presence, attracting more visitors and increasing engagement.

Mike Murphy reported that membership was six down on last year at 164, with 13 members lost during the year and seven gained. As Editor, he reported no less than eight nominations for the MacArthur Award, which was won by Peter Grech (ESC 266, *left*) for his article on *Port-Said surcharges 1921: the 'Joffre' issue (QC 286)*, winning by a single vote from Jos Strengholt's Marc Pourpe research (QC 287). Four QCs had been published on time, and he thanked his regular contributors for continuing to fill the pages with innovative and authoritative material. There is always a space for your offering, long or short!



John Davis, still recovering from major surgery, reported that the advent of the Facebook page, with its potential for instant answers to queries, has resulted in requests for books from the excellent and well-stocked Library falling to virtually nil. The literature, to which has now been added the Circle Record, is physically demanding in size, and he appealed

for another member to take it over.

Hani Sharestan described his duties as “to maintain a pleasant and safe Facebook page for members and non-members”. But it is more than that: he vets all potential messages on the page, advertises ESC Auction lots, encourages members by showing recent purchases and scans of newly discovered errors/varieties and comments on other members’ posts. The upshot is that membership is now rapidly approaching 800, at least a third of whom actually take part.

After the AGM we saw a stupendous display in very few pages from the Suez Canal section of Hany Salam’s Maritime Mail after 1869 collection. Astounding material was shown and described with enormous enthusiasm: a letter from De Lesseps, the only known cover posted from Sweden to the ceremony the day the Canal was opened, a Ballon Monté cover from Paris to a Canal Company official in Port Said.

And Canal Company mail: the only recorded cover bearing the 40c stamp (pen cancelled from Kantara), one of only three covers bearing the Canal de Suez / Chantier VI CDS, the only Chantier VI cover addressed overseas, a cover from a Spanish VIP at the opening addressed to Madrid from Ismailia, one of only two covers cancelled with Post Egiziane / Ramses, together with a pen-cancel from Chantier VI and examples of Ras el Ech and Kil 83 cds. Truly an astonishing display that had members amazed.

Hany’s tour de force was followed by two more displays to round off a splendid afternoon – Jon Aitchison showed essays of early Egyptian postal stationery envelopes from about 1865, including a 1pi blue envelope intended for reply mail, forerunner of the International Reply Coupon; and Atef Sarian (ESC 639) on the Second Issue, showing a staggering 128 pages of stamps, essays, varieties and postal history.

Footnote: After the meeting two more ESC officers joined the “two jobs club” – David Ogden agreed to take on the Meetings Secretary role (as well as Chairman); and Neil Hitchens added to his Webmaster portfolio by volunteering to collect from John Davis and house the Circle Library and the Circle Record. We very much welcome the kind gestures and hope that both might soon be able to return to single-role working on behalf of the Circle. Anyone willing to volunteer?