

Find out about Alexander Henry Rhind

Before your class watches [Ancient Egypt: Mummification and the Afterlife](#), follow the link below to discover more about Scottish archaeologist Alexander Henry Rhind, his work and connection to the museum's collection.

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/films/museum-animations/>



About Alexander Henry Rhind

Alexander Henry Rhind was the first archaeologist to excavate in Egypt. He worked with a skilled Egyptian team led by an expert excavator named Ahmed Abd er-Rasul. Their most spectacular discovery was an enormous tomb, built in 1290 BC for the Chief of Police and his wife who lived just after Tutankhamun's reign. You can see this beautiful statue of the couple in our Egypt gallery.



However, these two weren't the tomb's only inhabitants. During the next thousand years it was reused several times. Its final occupants were a whole family buried around 9 BC. By this time Egypt was ruled by the Romans, following their defeat in battle and death of the last pharaoh, Cleopatra.

Before Rhind's exploration no-one had properly excavated a tomb before and noted exactly what they found and where it was. Collectors often brought objects to museums, without knowing very much about them. Rhind was different as he wanted to understand how objects in tombs were used to protect the dead and help them reach the afterlife.

He realised that Egyptian culture was so ancient that it must have altered over time. From the objects in the tomb, and Rhind's discussions with experienced Egyptian excavators about what they knew from other tombs, he found out how objects in tombs changed over the years. For example, canopic jars were originally used to protect internal organs. Later, as tomb re-use became common, people were scared that they might lose their organs, so they were put back in the body and the jars replaced with solid dummy canopic jars. Even in the Roman period, a burial would include four mummified animals to represent the four Sons of Horus which had previously featured on the lids of canopic jars.

Discoveries like the Rhind tomb helped us to understand that during the long era of ancient Egypt, some things stayed the same while others changed.

Ancient Egyptian maths activity

Alexander Henry Rhind also helped us find out more about how ancient Egyptians did maths. In 1862 he bought a 5-metre-long papyrus now known as the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus. This had been used to train scribes, who were important in ancient Egypt as few people were able to read and write. Scribes were responsible for record keeping, drawing up legal documents, writing spells and generally helping to organise Egyptian society. To be good at their jobs they had to be both literate and numerate.

The papyrus contains 84 problems and their solutions. These range from working out the angles of pyramids to dividing food among workers. From it we learn that Egyptians were skilled in arithmetic, algebra, geometry, fractions and basic trigonometry.

We have included an activity for your class to do from the papyrus, so they can practice in the same way that scribes did many thousands of years beforehand. See the attachment 'Count like an Egyptian'.

Follow this link to see the papyrus in the British Museum's collections:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10057

We'd love to hear from your class during the week, and see your ancient Egyptian maths activities. Get in touch via our Twitter page @NMSEngage using the #NMSSchools or email schools@nms.ac.uk