

Sir Stamford Raffles

## Busy bee

**Raffles and the Golden Opportunity.** By Victoria Glendinning. *Profile*; 349 pages; £25

ABDULLAH, their secretary or *munshi*, was astounded by the constant activity. He marvelled at how Stamford and Olivia Raffles did not, like normal people, remain at rest until something came up that had to be done. They finished one apparently self-imposed task and immediately turned to another, and with massive consequences.

As Victoria Glendinning shows, it was hyperactive adults like these who hacked an empire out of the jungles of Asia. In defiance of the maxim of his East India Company bosses, "trade not territory", Raffles jostled for British supremacy against the Dutch in the Far East, founded the future city-state of Singapore and, where his writ ran, freed slaves, banned cock fighting, supported smallpox vaccination drives and abolished cruel punishments.

Ms Glendinning catches the nuances of early 19th-century English, which she obviously adores. A clerk says he's "doggedly contented". Another clerk describes a colleague as "one of the most pert, assuming, and forward coxcombs I ever saw". Raffles is praised for his "unwearied zeal and assiduity". Abdullah, a translator as well as a secretary, writes of the Raffles' marriage that they were "of one mind, like a ruler and his minister, like a ring and the jewel set in it, like sugar in milk".

The author is also magnificent on the customs and manners of the time. Officials of the East India Company splutter in furious exchanges of letters about their salaries or job titles. Wives snub those they deem of lower status, campaign against spittoons and bare feet, and struggle to stay composed while they witness fights to the death between tigers and buffaloes staged by native rulers to honour their husbands.

Life out there was hazardous for them, too. Olivia died within ten years of her marriage to Raffles. Sophia, his second wife, wore a gold bracelet with five small lockets attached to it. Each locket contained a scrap of hair from one of their children. Before she and Raffles boarded a ship back to England four of them were dead. That ship, the *Fame*, caught fire and sank with all their belongings, and they were lucky to escape with their lives.

By then Raffles was known as a scholar as well as an adventurer. It was, as Ms Glendinning recalls, an age when "culture was unitary", with little division between science and the arts and religion. Raffles learned local languages and collected arte-

facts. On the tropical islands he explored he studied animals and birds as well as plants. He even found time to write "The History of Java", a book that has had lasting value as source material for historians.

Sophia's firm Christian faith sustained her. Raffles often felt worn out. He was only 37 when he said in a family letter "as I advance in age, retirement becomes more and more congenial to me." Yet when he returned to England a few years later he still had the energy to help found the Zoological Society and to aid William Wilberforce's ambition to build St Mary's, Mill Hill, a glorious London church. By honing in on such a great life for her first non-literary biography Ms Glendinning is in danger of giving imperialism a good name. ■

**Ancient Egypt**

## Toot toot, King Tut

**Technology in the service of history**

FOR 3,000 years it was unknown—and that is what kept it safe. But so many people have visited the tomb of Tutankhamun, since Howard Carter, a British archaeologist, unearthed the steps leading down to the royal burial-chamber in November 1922 that it is now in critical condition. Shifting temperatures and humidity are affecting the delicate painted surfaces and conservation of the plasterwork has led to a build-up of salts under the plaster, pushing it off the walls. In January 2011 Zahi Hawass, then secretary-general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, announced that the tomb would soon have to close until a solution was found.

Mr Hawass lost his job soon after, in the tumult that followed the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak, but a solution to the problem of Egypt's tombs and tourists may be at hand. Ninety years after Carter's discovery, on November 13th, an exact facsimile of the royal tomb will be unveiled in Cairo. Replicas of delicate historic sites are becoming increasingly common; facsimiles of the painted caves at Lascaux, in France, and Altamira, in northern Spain, between them attract nearly 5,000 visitors a day. And the digital technology used in creating three-dimensional replicas is improving all the time (see comparisons pictured below).

The Tutankhamun facsimile is the most ambitious yet and is the work—and gift—of a Madrid-based artists' workshop, Factum Arte, and a Swiss philanthropic foundation. The workshop made its name in 2007 with a facsimile of Veronese's giant painting "The Wedding at Cana", which has been placed in its original location, the Palladian refectory of the Church of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice. If making an exact colour reproduction of a painting is technically difficult, copying a three-dimensional object poses even more of a challenge.

In 2009 Factum Arte's founder, Adam Lowe, and his team spent five weeks in Egypt making a forensic study of the tomb walls and sarcophagus. Without touching the surface, they made three different kinds of recordings: laser scanning—which operates like a bar code reading—to record the surface detail, white-light scanning to capture the relief and a close examination of the decoration to match up the colours.

There is a plan to erect the facsimile, which weighs nearly four tonnes, permanently in the Valley of the Kings. Others may follow. Factum Arte's first Egyptian facsimile, of the burial-chamber of Tutmosis III, unveiled in 2003, has already had more than 3m visitors. ■



Only one is the real thing