

Blazing The Trail: A.Z. Abushady And The Apis Club

Joy Garnett

A Z Abushady was the founder of the Apis Club at Benson in Oxfordshire. He was the first editor of its journal which was first published in June 1919. That journal is this journal, *Bee World*. Here, from a manuscript in progress, his granddaughter gives some insight into the life of this interesting man.

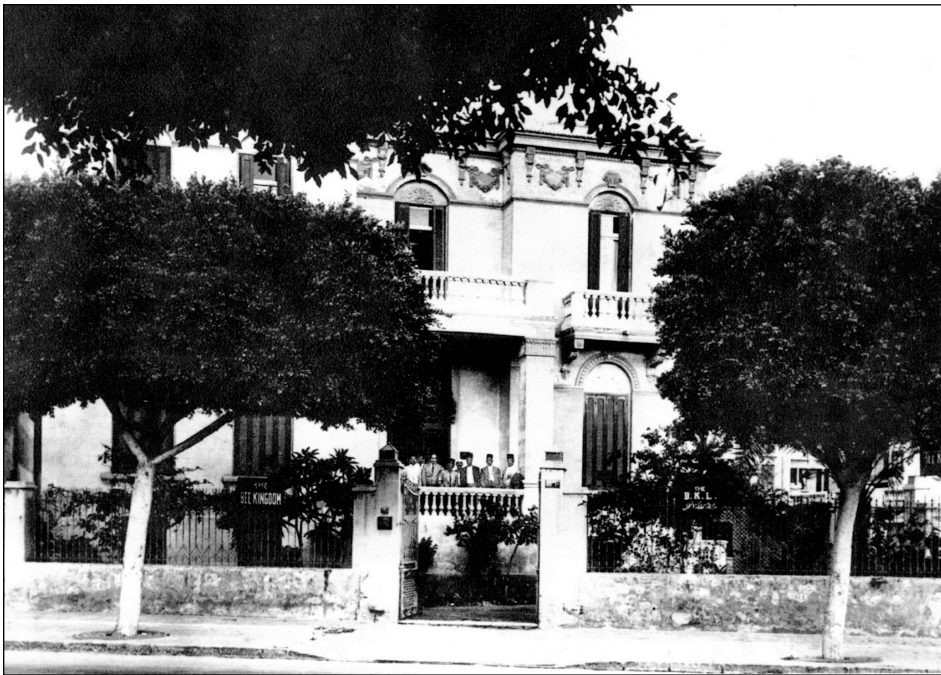


Photo. 1. 60 Rue Menasce, Alexandria, Ahmed Zaky Abushady's Egyptian Home and headquarters of the Bee Kingdom League, circa 1937. Photo courtesy of the Abushady Archive

In June 2013, I flew from New York to London and boarded a train to Aberystwyth to visit The National Library of Wales. I had made an appointment to examine the physical archive of the Apis Club, a British bee organization founded in 1919 in Benson, Oxfordshire and part of the Eva Crane Library. I had been traveling to libraries and archives conducting research for a book and other projects (Qualey, 2013). The main incentive behind this trip was the thought of getting my hands on several crates of glass lanternslides that I'd heard were part of the archive. There were other materials I wanted to see, but as a visual artist who traffics in visual artifacts, those lanternslides especially excited me.

The Apis Club, along with its monthly journal, *Bee World*, was the brainchild of a young Egyptian poet and physician, Ahmed Zaky Abushady, my maternal grandfather and the focus of my research. Born in 1892 in Cairo to a powerful family, my grandfather grew up surrounded by the luminaries of his parents' generation. His father, Muhammed Abushady Bey (Photo. 2.), was a barrister and president of the bar during a period when lawyers were gaining political power in Egypt (Reid, 1974). His mother, Amina Nagib, was from a family of noted poets, historians, and politicians. Their friends included prominent political figures - Mustafa Kamel and Sa'ad Zaghlul - and literary icons such as Khalil Mutran. In

this milieu, Zaky began writing poetry at twelve, and launched a short story magazine when he was sixteen. Mutran published Zaky's first collection of poems in 1910 when he was 18; they remained close friends.

Abushady Bey considered poetry unsuitable as a profession and pushed his only son to study medicine. This is ironic, since Zaky's fame as a poet, publisher, and pioneer of Modern Arabic poetry was to eventually overshadow his father's considerable notoriety. Young Zaky attended Cairo's School of Medicine for one year before Abushady Bey dispatched him to London to complete his medical studies and to acquire, presumably, a gentleman's education. It was 1912.



Photo. 2. Pere et fils, Cairo circa 1910. Photo courtesy of the Abushady Archive



Photo. 3. Annie Abushady conducting a hive inspection at Benson, circa 1920.

Photo courtesy of the Abushady Archive

After qualifying in Medicine at St. George's Hospital, Zaky set up house with his wife-to-be, Annie Bamford, whom he met on a London bus. He put out his shingle at 21 Cairn Avenue in Ealing and started a private practice. Together they dabbled in beekeeping (Photo. 3). Soon, he and Annie moved to Port Hill House in Benson, halfway along Braze Lane towards Roke Marsh. There, they expanded their operations considerably.

Annie and Zaky were the grandparents I never met but that I grew up hearing about. Family legend can be tricky: parts of the narrative are surreptitiously omitted by chance or by design. I tracked down what I could about Annie and Zaky, sifting through letters, snapshots and the inconsistent, contradictory memories of their children. I find Annie Bamford to be an intriguing, independent-minded woman. A self-described freemason and a bit of a black sheep, she came from a family of Stalybridge cotton weavers descended from Samuel Bamford, the renowned 19th-century labour organizer and author of *Passages in the Life of a Radical*. Samuel Bamford was a poet as well, writing exclusively in the Lancashire dialect (Bamford, 2014).

Annie and Zaky were creative co-conspirators. In Benson, Annie bred poultry, while Zaky devoted himself to his bees, writing and research in pathology. He patented several hive improvements (Abushady, 1919), experimented with breeding and plantings and promoted skill sharing for beekeepers and farmers.

Zaky laid out ambitious plans to build a "Beekeepers' Library" of scientific, practical and literary dimensions. With financing from the Egyptian landowner and cotton magnate 'Ali Manzalawi, Annie and Zaky formed a company, Adminson, Ltd., selling shares of stock to local and long-distance supporters. They were passionately invested in the co-operative movement, adopting the principles of The Rochdale Pioneers (Rochdale Pioneers, 2014). Their aims were to improve and standardize beekeeping practices throughout the region, to create a network through community outreach, to build support for continued research and publishing activities, and sustain their apiary of over 600 hives (Photo. 4).

Annie exerted an influence over everyone with whom she came into contact, including Zaky, whom she married in 1920. In the fall of 1922, she embarked on the adventure of her life when they left England for Egypt. There they started a family. Annie raised their three children while her husband threw himself into a multitude of enterprises that encompassed poetry, publishing, politics, medicine and science. Annie bred her beloved poultry in the backyard and bottled honey from their beehives, extracting it from the comb with a hand centrifuge. She read novels, chain-smoked, and summered alone with the children at seedy beach hotels in Port Said, while Zaky sweated it out in Cairo.

Abushady introduced the Langstroth hive and other beekeeping equipment and procedures to Egypt. In 1930, he launched the Egyptian counterpart to the Apis Club, "The Bee Kingdom League" and its bilingual journal, *The Bee Kingdom (Al-Mamlaka al-Nuhal)*, which he edited and published. His bee work caught the attention of Egypt's monarch, King Farouk, who invited him to establish the Royal Apiaries. In 1935, after a long peripatetic period with Cairo as their base, the Abushady family and The Bee Kingdom finally settled in Alexandria on the rue Menasce, where they flourished for the next decade.

For many years I focused on Abushady the Poet in my research and neglected Abushady the Bee Scientist, about whom I knew even less. Then one day in 2008, I made a crucial discovery. It came in the

form of a letter forwarded to me by my Aunt Safeya, the eldest Abushady child. Periodically, my aunt would send me pages of her father's unpublished poetry, radio addresses, and other odds and ends. The letter she sent me was dated January 30, 1987. It came from a curious stranger, the American filmmaker David Blair (Blair, 2014), who was researching early beekeeping practices for a project (Waxweb, 1993). He hoped to interview my aunt about her famous beekeeper father.

It was a colourful, exuberant letter, describing his journey on foot to Port Hill House and another to Cardiff, home of *Bee World*, where Blair was granted permission to examine glass lanternslides of the Apis Club in the IBRA archive before it was transferred to The National Library in Aberystwyth. This was the first time I heard about the Apis Club in any detail. Blair's excitement was infectious.

David Blair's interest in Abushady started at the New York Public Library when he came across the biography *Blazing the trail: reminiscences of A.Z. Abushady, poet - bee-keeper - humanist* (Harker, 1938). He next encountered Abushady at the British Library, where he called for a pamphlet describing the holdings of the Bee Research Association, founded in 1949 by bee expert, physicist Dr. Eva Crane. It described how in 1953 Dr. Crane received a large number of boxes from Annie D. Betts (Brown, 1994), an aero-



Photo. 4. Abushady himself in the Apis Club Apiary, circa 1921.

Photo courtesy of the Abushady Archive

nautical scientist who became the editor of *Bee World* in 1929. These boxes contained the entire archive of the Apis Club.

Blair became obsessed with Abushady. While still in England, he found a phone number for Dr. Crane and called her; to his surprise, she picked up. In the course of their conversation he asked if she ever met the man, and she replied dryly, "Why, of course I knew Abushady". Traveling to New York on business in 1954, she thought it necessary to track down the founder of the Apis Club. She found him in an apartment on the Upper East Side. Her timing was propitious, since Abushady died the following year.

Dr. Crane went on to explain how, in 1978, when visiting Egypt, and talking with prominent beekeepers there she learned that The Bee Kingdom League still met. She attended a meeting of the club in Cairo, where she gave a speech. The old bee men were quite excited over her, and took her to visit Abushady's old house on the rue Menasce in Alexandria, where she snapped a photograph. It was an extraordinary experience, she said, for those old men treated her as if she were the incarnation or living link to Abushady: "In Egypt, you know, the living and the dead are almost equally present" (Crane, 1987)

Finally, Blair describes discovering and examining the hundreds of glass lanternslides used by the Apis Club in illustrated lectures throughout the twenties. I decided I had to see them for myself.

Five years after discovering Blair's letter, I visited the National Library of Wales, present home to the Apis Club/IBRA archive. Enconced in the South Reading Room, I greedily poured over archival boxes, photo albums and accordion files. There were vintage family snapshots of old Snelgrove with his "bee beard"; annotated drafts of correspondence between Annie Betts and Eva Crane; beautiful line drawings of pollen grains; Adminson shareholders' certificates; rejected mock-ups for cover designs of *Bee World*; and blurbs promoting the

Apis Club, collected, presumably, by my grandfather. There was a clipping from *The Smallholder: Allotment-Holder & Small Farmer*, No.639, Vol.27, June 8, 1922, reporting that Apis Club membership had expanded to 13,000 since its inception.

The days in Aberystwyth were long and the sky unusually clear. After each full day spent indoors at the library, I soaked up several hours of fresh air and enjoyed a pint while watching the sun set over the ocean. I never did manage to see the lanternslides, but it was all very satisfying in the end. There was much else to see, and the lanternslides, while elusive, had brought me to this place on the edge of the continent where, at last, I could delve into the Apis Club archive, which now seems to me to document one of the most extraordinary if under-recognized of my grandfather's achievements.

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