

# Hathor

## Death on the Nile, Life on the Broads

By Chris Wood

The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads is a fascinating landscape, redolent of genteel days afloat amongst the reeds. It is a magical place, where tourism maintains a truce with nature conservation. But neither the hedonism of the tupperware cruisers, nor the refreshing wilderness of the nature reserves, quite masks the heritage of industry, commerce and agricultural toil that is the human history of the place.

Yet into this landscape, as the industry and water-borne trade finally succumbed to the railways, in the Edwardian calm before the storm of war and social change, a remarkable seed was sown. An exotic deity was transplanted from one field of reeds to another, welcomed into a foreign land by the enactment, knowingly or not, of ancient myths.

## The Colmans, wherries and Egypt

The city of Norwich sits as the inland focus of the Broads rather like Memphis to the Egyptian Delta. The city's rich history includes England's first non-denominational burial ground, the Rosary Cemetery, established by retired Unitarian minister Thomas Drummond in 1821.<sup>1</sup>

The Rosary was the first cemetery in England where anybody could be buried, regardless of their religion, with religious ceremony (or none) according to their tradition. Unconsecrated, save by use, the Rosary is still an active burial ground. Its lower part contains graves of many famous Norwich families, such as the Jarrolds and Colmans (of mustard fame). The Colmans' connection with Egypt is certainly not the most famous in Norfolk (Sir Henry Rider Haggard was born<sup>2</sup> and Howard Carter raised in the county<sup>3</sup>), but is perhaps the most significant, especially from a magical perspective.

Amongst the memorials in the Colman family plot, there is that of Alan Cozens-Hardy Colman, with the interesting fact that he died aged just 30, on the Nile at Luxor, in 1897. But that is just the beginning of our story.

Alan was one of six children, two boys and four girls, of Jeremiah James and Caroline Colman. Jeremiah had revolutionised the family mustard, flour and starch business, moving it to the Carrow site on the river Wensum in Norwich (where it still operates, although now as part of Unilever) and running it as a quintessential Victorian philanthropic patriarch. He also served as Norwich's MP for 24 years. His son's early death came as a considerable blow.<sup>4</sup>

Alan was dying of tuberculosis and his family took him to Egypt in the hope that the climate would make a difference to his health. The trip was sad, but Jeremiah took the opportunity to acquire many ancient artefacts, which later became the basis of Norwich Castle Museum's Egyptian collection.<sup>5</sup>

Alan's final days were spent on a luxury Nile sailing boat, called 'Hathor', after the Egyptian Goddess of love, joy and abundance, who gives succour to the dead and prepares them for the after-life, the Field of Reeds. Her worship has always been music and dance, and it is thought-provoking that in those last days on-board the Nile-boat 'Hathor': "*... a love of music came to Alan for the first time in his life, and he enjoyed to have his sisters play or sing to him.*" So wrote his sister Laura.<sup>6</sup>

In Egyptian mythology, Osiris is the God-King who dies in his prime. His sisters, Isis and Nephthys search long for His dismembered body, and finally remember Him and rejuvenate Him to become Lord of the Underworld. In 1904, two of Alan's sisters, Ethel and Helen remembered their brother by commissioning a pleasure wherry. This boat, which would carry Alan's memory through the fields of reeds in the Broads, was named 'Hathor' (pronounced 'Har-tor'; see below), and completed in 1905 by Halls of Reedham.

Wherries are a special Broadland trading vessel, which reached their design apogee in the late eighteenth century and displaced the larger, but slower and less manoeuvrable keels (vessels developed over the centuries from the Danish longships).<sup>7</sup> The development of the railways from the mid-nineteenth century changed the fortunes of trade on the winding Broadland rivers and led to the decline of the black-sailed traders (so-called because their sails were coated with coal tar and fish oil). Some were converted to pleasure wherries, taking

advantage of the developing holiday trade, and some were even built as such, never carrying a cargo other than leisure-seeking people.

The Hathor is also a very special pleasure wherry.<sup>8</sup> The internal woodwork, using sycamore panels, was designed to feature Egyptian imagery by the husband of another sister, Florence: Edward T. Boardman (who designed and built Broadland's famous How Hill house), assisted by Graham Cotman. The work was executed by John Hurn, costing £1057. Even the light-fittings include Hathor's sacred *menat* necklace-rattle in their design. The total cost came to over £2039, of which the actual boat-construction, without fitting-out, constituted £575. Sycamore (or to be accurate sycamore fig) is sacred to Hathor, Lady of the Sycamore in a land where trees are scarce. It is also interesting to note that the tree under which the biblical Mary and Joseph are reputed to have sheltered on their flight into Egypt is a sycamore fig.

The Colmans, Boardmans and friends used the Hathor for cruising until 1953, when she was sold to the Broads navigation surveyor Claud Hamilton. He sold her in 1964 to Martham Boatbuilding and Development Company, who used her mainly as a houseboat until 1974. After more than ten-years of neglect at Martham boat yard, she was bought and restored between 1986 and 1988 by Peter Bower and Barney Matthews of Wherry Yacht Charter. She now proudly sails the Broads again in company with wherry-yachts Norada, Olive and White Moth (although she is currently in dry dock for repairs, due for completion by 2015),<sup>9</sup> and has even carried the Bishop of Norwich to the annual service at the remains of St. Benet's Abbey on the river Bure!

Ethel and Helen Colman also cared for Jeremiah's collection of Egyptian antiquities after his death (in 1898), became enthusiastic members of the Egyptian Society of East Anglia from 1915, and in 1921 donated the collection to Norwich Castle Museum, where it forms the core of the Egyptian holdings, along with items from other donors, notably Rider Haggard.<sup>5</sup> Ethel became the first female Mayor of Norwich, in 1923, with Helen serving as Lady Mayoress!

## Names of (a) Power

The beautiful Hathor<sup>10</sup> is a powerful goddess of abundance, of cattle and the sky. She is love and pleasure, life, death and rebirth. She is patroness of foreign lands, metallurgy and minerals too, and the fiery serpent-eye of the Sun God, Ra (who is also honoured in the Broads in the form of a more recent solar-powered boat). She is one of the great Egyptian Powers (*ntrwt*)

whose influence resonates down the centuries. As such She is not monolithic; Her forms vary from place to place, and She shares attributes with other deities, reflecting the essentially holographic view of deity in ancient Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

Deities – Egyptian ones in particular – are not fixed. They interweave, combine and share characteristics as appropriate to the place or ritual in question. Indeed, not only are the Powers *represented* in hieroglyphs, they *are* hieroglyphs – a symbolic language by which we communicate with the Divine and create *Ma'at* (creative harmony), and with whom we work magic (*heka*).

The name ‘Hathor’ comes to us via Greek, and Her Egyptian hieroglyphs spell *ht-hr* (‘Source of Horus’), yet the name of the pleasure wherry is pronounced ‘Har-tor’; perhaps the element ‘hor’ offended Edwardian sensibilities! However, with a nod to French (1904 was of course the year of the *Entente Cordiale*), the name can be heard as ‘Heart-Or’ – ‘Heart of Gold’. How better for Her to become naturalised in the West?

## Hathor: Our Lady of the Broads

At first sight, a comparison between Norfolk and ancient Egypt seems unlikely. However, leaving aside the cooler climate and absence of encroaching desert, there are many things Broadland and the Nile Delta (prior to the Aswan dam) have in common.

The marshland is flat, with a huge sky. Waterways fringed with reeds meander between marshes grazed by cattle and rich in birdlife, the heron in particular. The traditional grazing marshes depend for their fertility on an annual flooding and for centuries the rivers were the main means of communication. As the keels and wherries of the Broads can be seen as a symbol of human control of the elements, so the ship of Hathor is a symbol of Her creative power, floating on and triumphing over the waters of chaos.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst the seasons are different, a comparison is possible, as in the Table below, which incorporates the key myths of the land – the feud between Osiris/Horus and Seth, and the transformations between Hathor and Her alter-ego Sekhmet, both of which are related to the seasons and the Nile flood, the main body of which runs red, like the blood-red beer used to trap the enraged Sekhmet and restore Her to the gentle form of Hathor. It would seem from the table that the Spring Equinox is the key festival for Hathor of the Broads.

# Ancient Egyptian and Broadland Seasons

Season	Egypt <sup>13</sup>	Broadland
<b>Harvest / Deficiency (<i>smw</i>).</b> Osiris lost / Horus fights Seth. Sekhmet reigns.	March-June Hot and dry.	August-September Hot and dry (relatively).
Turning point:	Summer Solstice	Autumn Equinox
<b>Inundation (<i>akht</i>).</b> Horus victorious. Sekhmet subdued.	July-October Nile floods.	October-March Winter floods.
Turning point:		Spring Equinox
<b>Emergence / Coming Forth (<i>prt</i>).</b> First Time / Creation. Osiris rises. Hathor returns.	November-February Waters subside and the fertile land is revealed.	April-July Marshes lush but dry enough for grazing.

## Process

I have found no evidence of any involvement with occultism on the part of any of the Colman family. There was an interesting and (then) unusual element to the Hathor's launch ceremony, in that two pigeons were released for good luck. This however was meant to follow a Japanese custom.<sup>8</sup> Things Japanese were as much in vogue as things Egyptian and, indeed, Alan's brother Russell had gone on a world tour, including Japan, in 1885/6.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst magical intent is powerful, so too is emotional engagement and an intent to do something remarkable in someone's memory. That in itself is a kind of magic. Alan died on the Nile journey at Luxor, an Osiris who was remembered by two sisters in the form of a very special 'ship' of Hathor, which still sails amongst a Field of Reeds under a wide sky.

People leave spiritual traces in the land, at best sanctifying, at worst suppressing the natural spirit of place (*anima loci*).<sup>15</sup> We bring with us our gods and goddesses when we move to new places, or indeed other people's gods and goddesses, if our attachment is strong enough. Sometimes, given enough emotional, spiritual or magical fuel, those deities take root in fertile soils,<sup>16</sup> as seems to have happened in the case of Hathor.

# Notes, references and further reading

- 1 Nick Williams, Jim Marriage and June Marriage (2005) *The Rosary Cemetery, Norwich: A Place of Decent Interment*, Friends of the Rosary, Norwich.
- 2 Shirley M. Addy (1998) *Rider Haggard and Egypt*, AL Publications, Accrington & Kessingland.
- 3 Nicholas Reeves & John H. Taylor (1992) *Howard Carter Before Tutankhamun*, British Museum Press, London.
- 4 S.H. Edgar (1984) *The History of J. and J. Colman*, privately published, Norwich.
- 5 Faye Kollianatis (2013) 'Jeremiah Colman: A Norfolk Traveller in Egypt' in Diane Fortenberry *Souvenirs and New Ideas: Travel and Collecting in Egypt and the Near East*, Oxbow, Oxford, pp. 68-79.
- 6 Laura E. Stuart (1898) *In Memoriam Alan Cozens-Hardy Colman*, privately published, Norwich.
- 7 Roy Clark (1961) *Black Sailed Traders: The Keels and Wherries of Norfolk & Suffolk*, David & Charles, Newton Abbot.
- 8 Peter Bower (1996) *Hathor: The Story of a Norfolk Pleasure Wherry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Broads Authority, Norwich.
- 9 Wherry Yacht Charter: [www.wherryyachtcharter.org](http://www.wherryyachtcharter.org) [accessed 27/4/14].
- 10 For detailed explorations of Hathor and her roles in ancient Egypt, see C. J. Bleeker (1973) *Hathor and Thoth: Two Key Figures of the Ancient Egyptian Religion*, Brill, Leiden; Alison Roberts (1995) *Hathor Rising: The Serpent Power of Ancient Egypt*, Northgate, Totnes and (2000) *My Heart, My Mother: Death and Rebirth in Ancient Egypt*, Northgate, Rottingdean; and Carolyn Graves-Brown (2010) *Dancing for Hathor: Women in Ancient Egypt*, Continuum, London.
- 11 See Erik Hornung (1982) *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. John Baines, Cornell University Press.
- 12 Bleeker, *op. cit.*,<sup>9</sup> p. 61.
- 13 Barbara Watterson (1996) *Gods of Ancient Egypt*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Sutton, Stroud, p. 7.
- 14 Russell J. Colman (1886) *Trifles from a Tourist*, privately published, Norwich.
- 15 See Nigel Pennick (1997) *Earth Harmony: Places of Power, Holiness and Healing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Capall Bann, Chieveley.
- 16 For an excellent fictional account of how this works, see Neil Gaiman (2001) *American Gods*, Headline, London.