

A Critical review of the Carmarthenshire Museum

by Sam Bennett

The museum central to the focus of this critical review is the county museum for Carmarthenshire, located outside the town of Carmarthen in Wales. In particular for the review I will be focusing primarily on the exhibition, Exploring Ancient Egypt: The Story of Harold Jones. The exhibit is focused around Harold's life just as much as it is around Ancient Egypt. This is very important to understand as it is clearly signaling what the museum is trying to accomplish with the exhibit: honouring the legacy of an important figure to Egyptology and the archaeological excavations that took place in Egypt at the turn of the 20th century. With the help of the collection Harold Jones acquired during his stay in Egypt, additional historical information can be given that ties the exhibit in with educating people about the many key locations excavated upon that Harold Jones visited. As an example, the exhibit features artefacts collected from Heirakonpolis, Esna and Abydos. The exhibit also provides information on the locations in relatively detailed paragraphs besides the artefacts which came from each respective location.



Orange pottery Jug from Abydos



Shabti of Ankh-ef-en-khonsu also from Abydos

The addition of these artefacts serve to tell the story of his life as the various locations they all come from in Egypt portray the distances to which Harold Jones travelled in life. The artefacts and how they are portrayed central to the exhibit serve to not only satisfy the archeological curiosity of visitors to the museum, but also to frame Harold's life work through physical evidence of his travels through more than just his artistry (also another key focus of the exhibit). In addition to artefacts there is also writing on the walls of the exhibition that tells the chronological story of Harold's life from his younger years in Barnsley to Carmarthen, his work in the valley of the kings to his death from tuberculosis in Egypt. The Writings are focused solely on Harold's life and work rather than the artefacts he collected that are on display in the exhibit, another way of signaling what story the exhibit is really wishing to tell. Also, in addition to writings about Harold Jones life, the exhibit uses traditional ancient Egyptian themes in the design of the (temporary) exhibition room with what would be familiar iconography and illustrations to visitors, as a further example of this, when entering the exhibit you must walk through a door that is painted/illustrated to symbolise the theme of Ancient Egypt. This works to effect in establishing the general theme of the exhibit and also distinguish it from the rest of the museum. It is reinforced outside of the illustrations on the walls and entrance with an interactive mummification dummy, displaying the different organs

that would be tampered with in the titular ancient practice. This is aimed at the younger generation who may not be as interested in a lot of the rather detailed writings depicted on the walls describing Harold Jones life or paintings. This idea of two separate generations being targeted in the exhibit is also backed up with the addition of a dress up in Egyptian clothes activity positioned next to the mummy. Both may be seen below:



Mummification display at the Carmarthenshire museum



Egyptian dress up activity at the Carmarthenshire museum

The exhibit successfully tells the story of Harold Jones life and pays a lot of respect towards the life of someone who had a very telling impact on early egyptology and the archaeological work that went on in Egypt at the turn of the 20th century. The parts of the exhibit that focus on his work and life are successfully told and do a decent job at portraying the journey and work he undertook in his life. This part of the exhibition felt correctly done, however, the lack of real description on the physical collection of artefacts felt missing, there is little in the way of actual information on the objects in the display that could be useful to visitors at the exhibit who are not fully familiar with the subject of Egyptology. Also the need to add things like the Egyptian dress and mummification doll, seem slightly out of place as to having much to do with Harold Jones life and work, an activity surrounding excavation or illustration seem more fitting rather than simply appealing to what younger children would associate with Ancient Egypt. It is slightly revealing as to the value modern culture may place upon the actual artefacts Harold collected which are not “golden idols” or Sarcophagi but rather pots and small Shabti and other figurines that clearly the museum also understands are maybe not worth the additional descriptions or explanations to try and get a younger generation to engage with them over activities that they may already associate with Ancient Egypt.

All pictures were taken by Sam Bennett, exhibition curated by Joann Fletcher. The museum itself is curated and ran by Cofgar.