

Walking through the doors of Carmarthenshire Museum is to enter a story of human experience that stretches back thousands of years. Nestled within the historic walls of the former Palace of the Bishops of St David's, the museum's galleries offer a layered narrative of local history and, in occasional special exhibitions, broader ancient civilisations. Given the museum's strong emphasis on regional identity and material culture, its treatment of ancient civilisations is both contextually rich and, at times, modestly scaled — offering visitors a blend of deep local roots and glimpses of far-flung past worlds.

One of the most compelling ways in which the museum engages with ancient civilisations is through special exhibitions that spotlight international archaeological narratives. A standout example is *Exploring Ancient Egypt: The Story of Harold Jones*, a temporary exhibition running through April 2026. This show draws on the remarkable life of Ernest Harold Jones, an artist and early archaeologist from the Carmarthenshire region whose work in Egypt in the early 20th century placed him at the heart of key Egyptological discoveries. By centring the exhibition on one local figure's interactions with Ancient Egypt's monumental past, the museum frames international antiquity through a personal, accessible lens. Visitors encounter vibrant paintings, archaeological finds from tomb sites, and engaging biographical material that bridges Wales to the pharaohs' world. This approach not only elevates Harold Jones's achievements but also proven effective in humanising a distant civilisation for modern museumgoers.

This exhibition is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it provides an entry point into Ancient Egyptian civilisation that does not rely on intimidating archives of esoteric artefacts — instead, using narrative and art to illuminate the ancient world. Secondly, it bridges local and global histories in a way few regional museums attempt, showing how individuals from rural Wales could and did contribute to understanding one of humanity's most astonishing ancient cultures. The curatorial choices — focusing on Jones's sketches and finds — enliven a past that might otherwise feel remote to visitors unfamiliar with Egyptology.

Beyond special temporary exhibitions, the museum's permanent displays engage more directly with the deep prehistory of the Carmarthenshire area. According to the museum's own collection overview, its archaeological holdings span more than 50,000 years, from Ice Age artefacts to objects of regional historical importance. While not all of these can be on display at once given space constraints, the museum nonetheless offers glimpses into prehistoric life, early metallurgy, and the Roman occupation of western Wales.

These local ancient displays typically include stone tools, pottery shards, and other remnants of early human activity. Presented alongside interpretive panels and maps, they give visitors a tactile sense of how prehistoric communities lived off the land, adapted to environmental changes, and gradually developed complex social practices. The museum's archaeological items related to prehistoric and Roman periods — some drawn from local excavations around ancient Morium, the Roman settlement that once stood in Carmarthen — help anchor the region within broader narratives of human settlement and empire. While these ancient local histories are not always given a separate gallery devoted exclusively to "ancient civilisations," they are woven into the broader tapestry of Carmarthenshire's human past, allowing visitors to see the deep roots of civilisation in the local soil.

Yet this integration has its strengths *and* its limitations. On the plus side, presenting ancient local artefacts within the same museum galleries as later historical periods encourages visitors to perceive continuity in human experience — from Stone Age tools to medieval crafts. It reinforces the notion that ancient civilisations were not distant abstractions but real

communities whose legacies became part of the region's foundation. On the minus side, the lack of a dedicated, comprehensive gallery on ancient civilisations per se means that comparisons with, say, Ancient Mesopotamia or Greece are left to special exhibitions or external events rather than museum core displays.

This curatorial choice reflects the museum's core mission: telling the story of Carmarthenshire's people, their environment, and their evolving ways of life. As a result, ancient civilisations are often given context through **local archaeological evidence** rather than broad civilisational overviews. This makes the museum especially compelling for visitors interested in how modern Wales connects to its earliest inhabitants. For example, displays related to Bronze Age and Iron Age communities, often accompanied by interpretive reconstructions, help visitors imagine life before written history and connect those early innovators to the land they inhabited.

Interpretation is further strengthened by the museum's educational design. Interactive exhibits and thoughtful signage make ancient materials accessible to families and school groups — important in a museum that holds history education as a central pillar. Rather than overwhelming visitors with overly technical descriptions, the museum opts for narratives that emphasise daily life, technology, and the human impulse to create and innovate. This pedagogical strategy nurtures curiosity and supports meaningful engagement with ancient civilisational remnants and stories.

In conclusion, **Carmarthenshire Museum** presents ancient civilisations with a distinctive blend of local focus and global curiosity. Its permanent displays ground visitors in the prehistoric and Roman past of the Carmarthenshire region, while temporary exhibitions like *Exploring Ancient Egypt* zoom out to connect that local past with the wider world's ancient cultures. The museum manages this balance with grace, engaging visitors of all ages and interests. While a more dedicated gallery on ancient civilisations might satisfy those seeking comprehensive global contexts, the current approach — rooted in narrative, personal story, and archaeological evidence — succeeds in making ancient worlds feel both accessible and relevant. Whether you're exploring early Welsh ancestors or walking through the story of a Carmarthenshire man in the Valley of the Kings, the museum invites you not just to observe history, but to experience it.