

19 May 2006

New light on Ancient Egypt

Fitzwilliam Museum's Egyptian galleries re-open with stunning new displays

The long-awaited results of a £1.5 million project to re-display the Fitzwilliam Museum's outstanding Egyptian collections will finally be revealed when the galleries re-open to the public on 25 May. Years of planning and eighteen months of refurbishment, research and conservation work will conclude with stunning new displays of over 1,100 objects, many exhibited for the first time.

From the splendour of the Pharaoh's court to the pursuits of his subjects, from aspects of daily life to religious beliefs, superstition and burial practices, visitors to the refurbished Egyptian galleries will be introduced to the history of Ancient Egypt and thematic displays on Egyptian religion and magic, writing, carving and drawing, dress and adornment, and other aspects of daily life. In an inner gallery, dimly lit to evoke the atmosphere of an ancient Egyptian tomb, burial practices from the Pre-dynastic period to Coptic and Islamic Egypt are explored through coffin assemblages and objects associated with funerary ritual.

In-depth research on many objects has been made possible by the project, a major focus being the coffins, where wood, pigment and structural analysis has been carried out. Wood analysis was undertaken in collaboration with the British Museum and Anglia Ruskin University generously lent their Raman spectrometer for pigment analysis. The Museum's human and animal mummies were CT-scanned at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, in order to study their contents and condition; the intriguing results will be revealed later this year. The University of Cambridge Department of Engineering manufactured customised mounts for many of the objects and their expertise proved invaluable in the relocation of some of the heavier exhibits.

The Egyptian collections have been conserved and re-displayed through the generosity of The Heritage Lottery Fund, The DCMS/Wolfson Foundation Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund, The Garfield Weston Foundation, The Getty Foundation, The Isaac Newton Trust, Renaissance, The Trust House Charitable Foundation, The Aurelius Charitable Trust and other corporate and private donors.

Museum Director Duncan Robinson said "We are delighted that the latest stage in our ongoing programme of gallery improvements has reached a successful conclusion and that the Museum is now able to offer visitors an enhanced experience of one of the most popular areas of its collections."

Dr Lucilla Burn, Keeper of Antiquities and project leader, said "The refurbishment of the Egyptian galleries has afforded an invaluable opportunity not only to re-display the collections in a contemporary and dynamic way, and to research and conserve numerous objects, but also to provide for visitors of all ages a more coherent and enjoyable experience, rich with information about the exhibits and the culture they represent. The successful outcome of the project is a fitting testament to the commitment and enthusiasm of staff and volunteers, funders, supporters and collaborators, all of whose contributions are acknowledged with gratitude."

A special week-long programme of Egyptian events for all ages during Museums and Galleries Month 2006, starting with an Egyptian Galleries Open Day on Saturday 27 May, will bring to life many aspects of the new displays through talks, trails and gallery tours, workshops, storytelling and drop-in sessions. Mummy-wrapping and cartonnage-making are just two of the planned events, offering adults and children a chance to experience these processes at first hand. Details of all events may be found at www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk.

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.../Further information and images

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The Egyptian Galleries at The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB, re-open to the public on Thursday 25 May; admission is free.
Details of special events from 27 May to 2 June from www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk or 01223 332900.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Fitzwilliam Museum houses the University of Cambridge's art collection and is a public museum and art gallery with an international reputation. More than half a million objects and works of art are held in five curatorial departments: Antiquities, Applied Arts, Coins and Medals, Manuscripts and Printed Books and Paintings, Drawings and Prints.

The Fitzwilliam Museum attracts around 300,000 visitors a year. It is open Tuesday to Saturday, 10.00 am to 5.00 pm, Sundays and Bank Holidays, 12.00 noon to 5.00 pm. Admission to the permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions is free.

Website: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

The special **programme of Egyptian events** for all ages from 27 May to 2 June is supported by Coutts & Co and Renaissance East of England.

The **Cardozo Kindersley Workshop** in Cambridge designed the stone plaque commemorating the re-opening of the Egyptian Galleries. The inscription, carved with chisel and hammer into the Portland stone, thanks the generous donors who made the re-opening possible

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