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Ancient Egyptian cliffhanger launches creative writing competition at Cambridgewordfest

The ancient Egyptian story of the Doomed Prince is well known to Egyptologists. It records the adventures of a young man fated to die in one of three ways: by the snake, the dog or the crocodile.

The story is recorded on a piece of papyrus, now in the collection of the British Museum and, thanks to their generosity, soon to be on view at the Fitzwilliam Museum. However, the ending is lost: the papyrus is broken off at a crucial point when our hero, who has already been saved from the snake, is being pursued by a dog and has come face to face with a crocodile. So what happened to the young prince?

Members of the public are being given the opportunity to devise a suitable ending for the tale, or else to write a fairytale of their own, and win some great prizes through a competition being organized by The Fitzwilliam Museum and Cambridgeshire County Council Literature Development. The idea is the brainchild of Helen Strudwick, Outreach Officer for ancient Egypt at The Fitzwilliam Museum, and Helen Taylor, the Council's Literature Development Officer.

"It grew out of a conversation we were having about ancient literature and has developed into a fantastic project, involving museums and libraries across East Anglia," said Helen Strudwick. "We suddenly had the idea of getting people to finish off the tale, or write a new one, incorporating objects in museum collections around the region. The competition links in with the reopening of the Museum's Egyptian galleries in late May."

"When Helen told me about the Doomed Prince, I realised it was basically a classic fairytale, which ties in with this year's theme for the county's annual writing competition and also runs through Cambridgewordfest", said Helen Taylor. "I also wanted to work with museums and libraries, so this has turned out to be a perfect partnership project, generating new writing and new visitors to libraries and museums. Creativity and lifelong learning have come together in the workshops, the displays and the competition. This is a unique project."

The competition will be launched on Thursday 20 April as a preview event for the Cambridgewordfest, with a public performance at The Fitzwilliam Museum by Adrian Mitchell, well known as a poet, dramatist and storyteller. Tickets, price £5, are available from www.adctheatre.com, telephone 01223 300085, and demand is anticipated to be high. The competition will run through the summer, the closing date for entries being 15 September, and is open to people aged 14 and over who live, work or study in East Anglia. The project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and sponsors include Egypt Air, Heffers Books and British Museum Press who have contributed prizes for the competition.

"We've had an incredible response from other museums about the idea, and we expect the competition to generate considerable interest," say the two Helens. So, what does happen next in the tale of the Doomed Prince? "We're waiting to find out", they say.

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.../Further information and images

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

Members of the press are welcome to attend the competition launch at The Fitzwilliam Museum on Thursday 20 April and should contact Helen Strudwick (01223 764389; email hmsl2@cam.ac.uk) regarding admission arrangements. Adrian Mitchell and competition organizers Helen Strudwick and Helen Taylor are available for interview by prior arrangement with Helen Strudwick.

The Fitzwilliam Museum and its Egyptian collections

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 results of a £1.5 million project to re-display the Museum's outstanding Egyptian collections will be revealed when the Egyptian galleries reopen to the public on 25 May. Years of planning and eighteen months of refurbishment, research and conservation work will result in stunning new displays of over 1,100 objects, many exhibited for the first time. From 27 May, a special week-long programme of Egyptian events for all ages during Museums and Galleries Month 2006 will bring to life many aspects of the new displays through talks, trails and gallery tours, workshops, storytelling and drop-in sessions.

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; closed Mondays. Admission to the permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions is free.

Website: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

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