

***Discover Your Past – the Archaeology of Tayside : McManus Galleries, Albert Square, Dundee.***

At the invitation of Adrian Zealand, Assistant Keeper of Human History, I recently spent a very interesting afternoon at the McManus Galleries in Dundee viewing a major new display in the Archaeology Gallery. 'Discover Your Past – the archaeology of Tayside' was opened in October 1987, and it certainly deserves the degree of public interest which was apparent on the day of my visit. The display was designed and constructed by an in-house team who have succeeded in creating a very real sense of participation in the events of the past as one views archaeological features set in their natural environment.

In the section dealing with prehistoric settlers, artefacts are imaginatively displayed in cabinets and tape-recordings of appropriate noises suggest to the visitor that these early settlements were largely coastal, and a further tape-recording, in conjunction with a model of a ploughman finding treasure trove, very effectively communicates to the viewer the importance of leaving such finds alone and reporting them to the authorities. The billowing starched calico which forms the roof of this section is a little overpowering but, viewed from outside the structure, it is more obviously tent-like and appropriate to the lives of the early nomads. It was constructed as part of a Public Arts project carried out by Dundee College of Art diploma students.

Boats are part of my island heritage and I was most impressed by the 8 metre long log-boat (circa A.D. 500) which is very realistically displayed in a recreation of the reed-bed where it was found by salmon fishers. Also most impressive is the ring-ditch house which occupies the corner opposite the log-boat. Lack of space militated against rebuilding the whole house but its corner position creates the optical illusion of wholeness although only one quarter of the house is represented. Dr. Bruce Walker and students of Dundee College of Art assisted in the reconstruction of the house.

Following this display, some wall charts outline the principles and practices of archaeology using a cartoon figure Archie Logical, who very obviously captivated the interest of young museum-goers, as did the neighbouring model of the Finavon Hill Fort. In the Roman section some fine specimens of lintel stone and other building

materials are displayed, as well as various smaller artefacts from the Roman legionary base at Carpow, Abernethy, Perthshire.

Pictish symbol stones complete the chronologically organised archaeological evidence but several wall charts give further information, taking the visitor on a rapid scamper through the centuries up to 1100 A.D. before reaching the final display in the gallery. This consists of a collection of Egyptian antiquities and one has the unfortunate suspicion that a gap-site had to be found for the collection somewhere, although ingenious efforts have been made to integrate it. In itself, it is a pleasant enough display and the pyramid-like structure through which one enters does partially separate it from the previous section but the overall dissonant effect is regrettable.

This criticism apart, however, it is an impressive presentation and the museum staff are to be complimented on the evident success of all their hard work.

**Doreen Waugh**