

Wall Face



Antiquarian Image Card #6: Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge by Powys Evans

Pen and Ink, February 1923, NPG 6794

Linked to Chesters Museum (Northumberland)

Sir Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis Budge (27 July 1857–23 November 1934)

Egyptologist and Keeper of the British Museum, building an admired museum collection via purchase of artefacts rather than excavation. He has been criticised for lack of detail and precision, and providing contradictory or inaccurate information. This caricature of him was published in the Saturday Review after the official 'discovery' of Tutankhamun's tomb.

Key achievements

- Rose from an illegitimate, working-class background to study at Cambridge University after his hard work and diligent study was sponsored by influential friends and MPs.
- Prolific and well-planned acquisitions gave the British Museum arguably the best Ancient Near-East collections in the world, when there was huge competition for purchasing artefacts to avoid the uncertainty and cost of excavating.
- His collection pre-dates the later more rigorous archaeological practices, technology and cumulative knowledge about assessing artefacts in place.

Links to Hadrian's Wall

- Was invited to Chesters in 1903 by the Clayton family to compile a catalogue of their museum collection to update the 1900 'hand list' which visitors carried with them.
- Although he wasn't a Roman expert, his work for the British Museum gave him authority, and as well as a catalogue of the collection on display, Budge arranged for mounts for the large stones, and re-arranged the order of the items in the table-cases.

Character insights

- He enjoyed the company of the well-born, and was a much sought-after dinner guest in London for his humorous stories and anecdotes.
- He was noted for his kindness and patience in teaching young visitors to the Museum
- This cartoon was published in a weekly magazine, and the artist *Quiz* was known for his distinctive and occasionally vicious caricatures of well-known personalities of the day.



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