

Archaeological Career and Legacy of Arthur Evans

Posted on October 10, 2019

Personal Information

Arthur Evans was born on July 8, 1851, in Nash Mills, England. He was the first child of John Evans and Harriet Dickinson. Arthur's father, John Evans, had worked in his Uncle's paper mill, where he met and married his cousin, Harriet, in 1850. The couple had four more children, Philip, Lewis, Harriet, and Alice, before Harriet's own death in 1858 (Ashmolean). Despite his mother's early death, his father lived a long life until 1908. John Evans's salary from working in the paper mill helped fund Arthur's future career as an archaeologist. Not only did his father's salary help fund his future career, but his father's work at the mill also helped inspire it. His father had been studying water resources around the mill and, during the process, discovered Stone Age artefacts. As Arthur grew older, John brought Arthur along to help look for more artefacts along the stream beds. After this, John became an antiquarian and published many books about his discoveries. John's connections from his publications helped Arthur begin his archaeological career.

Arthur Evans came from a family where the men were well-educated. Arthur started his education early at Calipers Preparatory School as a child. He then advanced to Harrow School in 1865 at the age of 14, where he became a co-editor of *The Harrovian*, the school newspaper. In 1870, after graduating from the Harrow School, he enrolled and attended Brasenose College, one of the colleges of the University of Oxford (Historians). There, he studied modern history, although he was mostly interested in archaeology. While he was a studious man, he had difficulty graduating due to failing one of his exams. Despite this, his connections with the examiner allowed him to pass and graduate in 1874 at the age of 24.

Literature Review

During his years at Oxford, Arthur went on a series of adventures. In 1871, he visited Hallstatt, Austria, where his father had excavated previously. After collecting some artefacts for his personal collection there, he then travelled to France. In France, he visited Paris and then Amiens, where he hunted for Stone-Age artefacts in gravel quarries. In 1872, he then travelled into the Ottoman territory by the Carpathian Mountains. Then, in 1873, he travelled to Finland and Sweden. It is here that he began to delve more into his archaeological roots. He took many notes and drawings of people and artefacts in this region. When Arthur went back to England for his Christmas holiday, he helped John Gardner Wilkinson, a well-known British Egyptology archaeologist, catalogue a coin

collection when he was unwell. It was soon after he graduated that he applied for the Archaeological Traveling Studentship offered by Oxford, but two people within the university who did not like his work turned him down. Instead, he was sent to Gottingen, Germany, to research modern history. He did not enjoy either the topic or his living situation while he was there, so he abruptly left for another adventure to the Balkan Peninsula. This proved to be the end of Arthur Evans's formal education as he was an adventurous man who would rather be out in the field rather than reading books.

Ideological

Archaeology Career

Arthur Evans's archaeological career had no concrete beginning or end. Even during his childhood, he was helping his father discover artefacts. However, we will consider the beginning of his formal career to be after he graduated from the University of Oxford. The beginning of his formal career did not start in archaeology at all but in journalism. His brother Lewis and he travelled to Bosnia in 1875, where they felt sympathy for the oppressed people in the Balkan Peninsula and also in Crete. Arthur's liberal ideas about the sensitive situation caused him to be put in a cell for a brief amount of time.

Once released, he wrote about his experiences and was hired in 1877 by the Manchester Guardian to report on events in the Balkans. To continue his career, he travelled back to Bosnia and began collecting portable artefacts, usually seal stones. While he was there, he joined back up with the man who helped him after being released from prison, Edward Freeman. As they became friends, Arthur fell in love with Edward's daughter, Margaret. In 1878, Arthur proposed to her, and they were soon married. They bought a house in Ragusa, Italy, where Arthur continued to pursue his journalism career. His political writings once again got him in trouble with the Yugoslavian government, and he spent six weeks in prison waiting for trial. In the end, no evidence could be used against him, but the Evans family left Europe and headed back to England anyway.

Once the family was back in England, they rented a house near Oxford in 1883. During this period, Arthur Evans experienced unemployment, but he used this time to finish his Balkan studies. After that, he and Margaret travelled to Greece, where they met with Heinrich Schliemann and examined Mycenaean artefacts. It was this event that began his formal archaeological career, which he would become known for. Soon after, in 1884, he was offered a position as the keeper of the Ashmolean Museum. The museum was going through a hard time as it had lost a large portion of its historical collections to another museum. With Arthur's help, the museum was revived and turned into an archaeological museum.

In 1886, his archaeological roots once again called to him. A cemetery in Aylesford, England, was discovered as being dated around the British Iron Age. Evans did some coin, metalwork, and pottery analysis of the artefacts found in that area to date the cemetery (Hingley). After doing some work there and publishing some articles, Arthur continued his life travelling, revitalizing the Ashmolean

Museum, and continuing his archaeological work. From 1892 to 1893, Arthur's way of life drastically changed. His good friend and father of his wife, Edward Freeman, passed away due to a combination of poor health and smallpox. As he and Margaret mourned Edward's loss, she, too, fell ill.

In an effort to save her, Arthur bought some land in Boar's Hill, near Oxford, where he began to build a log cabin elevated off the ground in an attempt to keep her away from cold, damp conditions. They took a brief vacation after beginning construction by visiting Athens to meet John Myers and discuss some seal stones that were covered in strange writing from Crete. On their travels, Margaret was stricken by her disease, and despite Arthur's efforts to save her, in 1893, she too passed away due to what is speculated to be tuberculosis or a heart attack. She was 45 when she passed away. Arthur, with the loss of his wife and good friend, went into a period of grieving. It was during this time that he took a break from his archaeological career and instead focused his energy on completing the mansion on Boar's Hill, which he then named Youlbury (MacGillivray, 2001).

Professional & Intellectual

Major Contributions to the Field of Archaeology

Most of Arthur Evans' contributions to archaeology were from his discoveries at the site of Knossos. However, he also contributed to other parts of the field. One of those contributions would be the Ashmolean Museum. During his time there, he managed to not only revive the museum from near closure but also helped it flourish. He transformed the history museum solely into an archaeology museum. Arthur managed to receive some of the collections back that were taken from its premises and also made major contributions himself. He donated all of his father's archaeological collections to the museum along with his own extensive collections, including the artefacts that he collected from Knossos. Presently, the museum has one of the best displays of Crete artefacts outside of the island itself due to Arthur Evans's generous contributions.

Arthur Evans also contributed to British Iron Age studies. This development came out soon after Evans excavated the cemetery in 1886. Arthur made the connection between this Aylesford site and the Swarling site and developed theories on the culture. Not only did he discover the first wheel-made pottery in Britain, but he also concluded that the site belonged to a culture similar to the continental Beagle, which dates back to around 75 BC. Many people in the field still view his work as a great contribution to the Iron Age studies.

And finally, Knossos, this Cretian site, is what Arthur Evans is most notably known for excavating and studying. Knossos is known for being the largest Bronze Age settlement on the island of Crete (Hogan). It was an expansive palace made up of over 1,000 interlocking rooms.

The rooms served religious, residential, and educational purposes, although it is the art on the walls that makes the palace the most interesting. Arthur Evans noticed these, too, and named it the Palace

of Minos. This was due to the maze-like quality of the interlocking rooms that reminded him of not only the labyrinth in Greek mythology but also of the Minotaur that lived there. It was after this king and beast that Minoan civilization was eventually born. From the excavations, over 3,000 clay tablets were found with scripts similar to those found on his seal stones and jewellery. Two different types of scripts were found on the tablets, and Evans perceived them as their own individual writing systems. These two systems were termed Linear A and Linear B, where A precedes B. It is these tablets that Evans continued to study and develop theories on until his death at the age of 90 in 1941. It is to this day, the tablets still haven't been convincingly deciphered, although his classification and transcriptions of the tablets have been important to the Mycenaean archaeological field (Middleton & Wilkins, 1991).

Legacy

Arthur Evans' legacy was remembered in several different ways after his death. He left behind many of his honours at the societies he had joined, including the Lyell Medal, the Copley Medal, an honorary doctorate from the University of Dublin, and being knighted by King George V for his contributions to archaeology. He also transformed the Ashmolean into an archaeological museum of international importance and a first-rate research institution (Oxford). The Ashmolean Museum still holds the largest collection of artefacts outside of Greece after his generous donations. He donated money to a studentship to continue the discovery of archaeology. While the mansion on Boar's Hill has since been demolished, part of the estate was given to the Boy Scouts and Youghbury camp to be available for their use. Also, in Arthur and Margaret's honour, a garden was erected for their legacy. In the end, we cannot but admire the man who discovered the Minoans and demonstrated as never before how archaeology can reconstruct the past (Evans & Brown, 2001).

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