REVIEW OF THE EXHIBITION ON NOEL CARRINGTON AT THE HIGGINS, BEDFORD

by MARK STEINHARDT

As founder and editor of almost the whole Puffin Picture Book series, Carrington's role in Penguin history is well-known. He was educated at Bedford School and his connection to the town is greatly valued by both the school and The Higgins gallery. Funded by Arts Council England, this large and beautifully presented exhibition does Carrington proud and offers far more than his Penguin achievements.

We would expect nothing less from the co-curator, one of our own, Joe Pearson. In his address at the opening night, Joe expressed his particular pleasure in bringing into the light a figure who might otherwise be thought of as only a footnote in publishing history. He drew attention to Carrington's special ability as a talent spotter.

For us, of course, seeing all 120 Puffins Picture Books together, immaculately framed, is the first delight, but it is only the first. The visitor can work around the large space chronologically and follow a lifetime in publishing – and also, simply, a life. There are family photographs, and paintings by Carrington's older sister, Dora, to flesh out the portrait.

If you live within reach, do try to see this exhibition. Make a day of it. The weird and wonderful Panacea Museum is across the road to the east, and the John Bunyan Museum across the road to the north.

If you don't know it, The Higgins has a collection far beyond what you might expect from a small-town regional exhibition space. Alongside the archaeology and artefacts, is an exceptional collection of prints, drawings and watercolours. By avoiding expensive, trophy oils, the gallery has always got the very best from its financial resources. Artists known to us from King Penguins and Picture Puffins are well represented.

The exhibition continues until the end of June 2026.



