



Extracts from Howard Carter's Diary (1922)

[Abridged]

Between Wednesday 1st November and Sunday 5th November, Howard Carter found the entrance to, what he thought was, an undiscovered tomb. The doorway at the bottom of the excavated stairs was stamped with the Royal Necropolis seal indicating it belonged to a pharaoh. After years of little success, Carter now got excited. Although he couldn't be certain, and he was puzzled by its small size, he began thinking that he had discovered one of the missing tombs in the Valley of the Kings and messaged Lord Carnarvon (Who was providing Carter with the money for his investigations) to tell him to come to him as soon as he could. His message read;

"At last have made a wonderful discovery in Valley a magnificent tomb with seals intact recovered same for your arrival congratulations"

These diary entries continue from the day after he sent the message.

Monday 6th November 1922

The men worked feverishly today covering and making safe the discovery until the time came for fully reopening. On top of which great stones were rolled.

Tuesday 7th November 1922

The news of the discovery spread fast all over the country and inquisitive enquiries mingled with congratulations become the daily programme.

We continued clearing the bed rock of the valley where many more huts were exposed. These were evidently part of the camp for Ramses VI tomb. The investigation continued until 13th November. Here, as I found in most other cases, the excavations of former explorers only skimmed the top surface and had not even laid bare the huts of the ancient workmen.

Monday 20th November 1922

Lord Carnarvon and Lady Evelyn Herbert arrive in Cairo.

Wednesday 22nd November 1922

Lord Carnarvon left Cairo for Luxor.

Thursday 23rd November 1922

Lord Carnarvon arrived in Luxor, came over to Gurna and stayed at my house. Callender restarted uncovering the tomb.

Friday 24th November 1922

Lady Evelyn Herbert arrived. Now that the whole of the sealed doorway was laid bare, various seal impressions bearing the cartouche of Tutankhamun were visible. In the upper part of this sealed doorway traces of two distinct reopenings and successive reclosings were apparent and that the seal first noticed on November 5th had been used for the reclosing. This was evidence of the reign of the tomb but its significance was still a puzzle because in the rubbish that filled the staircase entrance we found masses of broken pots and boxes bearing the names of Akhenaten, Smenkh-Ka-Ra and Tutankhamun and, even more upsetting, a scarab of Tehutimes III as well as a fragment bearing the cartouche of Amenhetep III. This led us to believe that we were about to open a royal store of the 18th dynasty and that it had probably been opened and used more than once.

Slept the night in the valley.

Saturday 25th November 1922

Noted seals. Made photographic records which were not, as they afterwards proved, very successful. Opened the first doorway covered with various seals of Tutankhamun and the Royal Necropolis.

As we cleared the passage we found mixed with the rubble broken pots, jar seals and lots of fragments of small objects, water skins lying on the floor, whole and broken pottery vases all leading towards some disturbed burial but telling us nothing to whom they belonged. These were disturbing elements as they pointed towards plundering.

Sunday 26th November 1922

After clearing 9 metres of the passage we came upon a second sealed doorway which was almost exactly the same as the first.

Feverishly we cleared away the remaining scraps of rubbish on the floor of the passage until we only had the clean sealed doorway in front of us. After making some notes, we made a tiny hole in the top left corner to see what was beyond. Darkness and the iron testing rod told us that there was an empty space. Candles were procured – the all-important tell-tale for foul gases when opening an ancient subterranean excavation. I widened the hole and looked in while Lord Carnarvon and Lady Evelyn Herbert waited in anxious expectation.

It was sometime before I could see, the hot air escaping caused the candle to flicker but, as soon as my eyes became accustomed to the glimmer of light, the interior of the chamber gradually loomed before me, with its strange and wonderful medley of extraordinary and beautiful objects heaped upon another.

There was naturally short suspense for those who could not see, when Lord Carnarvon said to me “Can you see anything?”. I replied to him “Yes, it is wonderful”. I then made the

hole large for both of us to see. With the light of an electric torch, as well as an additional candle, we looked in. Our sensations and astonishment are difficult to describe as the better light revealed to us the marvellous collection of treasures: two strange ebony-black statues of a King, gold sandaled, bearing staff and mace, loomed out from the cloak of darkness. Gilded couches in strange forms, lion-headed, Hathor-headed, and beast infernal. Exquisitely painted, inlaid, and ornamental caskets, flowers, vases, strange black shrines with a gilded monster snake appearing from within, quite ordinary looking white chests, finely carved chairs, a golden inlaid throne, a heap of large curious white boxes. Beneath our very eyes, on the threshold, a lovely wishing-cup in translucent alabaster, stools of all shapes and design and, lastly, a confusion of overturned parts of chariots glinting with gold, peering from amongst which was a manikin. The first impression of which suggested the property-room of a vanished civilization. Our sensations were bewildering and full of strange emotion. We questioned one another as to the meaning of it all. Was it a tomb or merely a store? A sealed doorway between the two sentinel statues proved there was more beyond, and with the numerous cartouches bearing the name of Tutankhamen on most of the objects before us, there was little doubt that there was the grave of that Pharaoh.

Monday 27th November 1922

It soon became obvious that we were just on the threshold of the discovery. The sight that met us was beyond anything anyone could believe. The amount of material crowded into the chamber without particular order was very bewildering. Everywhere we found traces of disorder caused by some intruder, objects over-turned, broken fragments lying upon the floor and the unfamiliar plan of the tomb repeatedly caused us to ask ourselves whether it was really a tomb? As the better light fell upon the objects we endeavoured to take them in. It was impossible. They were so many. Beneath one of the couches we perceived an opening in the rock-wall which proved to be another sealed-doorway broken open. With care, Lord Carnarvon and I crept under this strange gilded couch, and we peered into the opening. There we saw that it led into yet another smaller chamber. It was full of furniture. An utter confusion of beds, chairs, boxes, vases, statuettes and every sort of thing overturned and searched for valuables. The remaining portions of the plaster covering the blocking of this doorway bore similar seal-impressions as on the other doorways.

In neither of these two chambers could we see any traces of a mummy or mummies. With such evidence, as well as the sealed doorway between the two guardian statues of the King, the mystery gradually dawned upon us. We were but in a portion of a tomb. Behind that closed doorway was the tomb-chamber, and Tutankhamen probably lay there in all his magnificent panoply of death - we had found that monarch's burial place intact.

We then examined the plaster and seal-impressions upon the closed doorway. They were of many types of seals, all bearing the insignia of the King. We also discovered that in the bottom part of the blocking a small breach had once been made, large enough to allow of a small man to pass through, but it had been carefully reclosed, plastered and sealed.

Evidently the tomb beyond had been entered - by thieves! Who knows? But sufficient evidence to tell that someone had made ingress.

The results of our investigations were, (1) it was clear the place was Pharaoh's tomb; (2) that we had only entered the anterior chambers of the tomb, filled with magnificent

equipment equal only to the wealth and splendour of the New Empire; (3) that we had found a royal burial little disturbed.

It was a sight surpassing all precedent, and one we never dreamed of seeing. We were astonished by the beauty and refinement of the art displayed by the objects surpassing all we could have imagined - the impression was overwhelming.