

# Who Was Howard Carter?

Howard Carter was a British **archaeologist**, who led the team that found Tutankhamun's **tomb** in the Valley of the Kings.

## Howard Carter Fact File



Name: Howard Carter

Born: 9<sup>th</sup> May 1874,  
Kensington, London

Job: **Archaeologist**

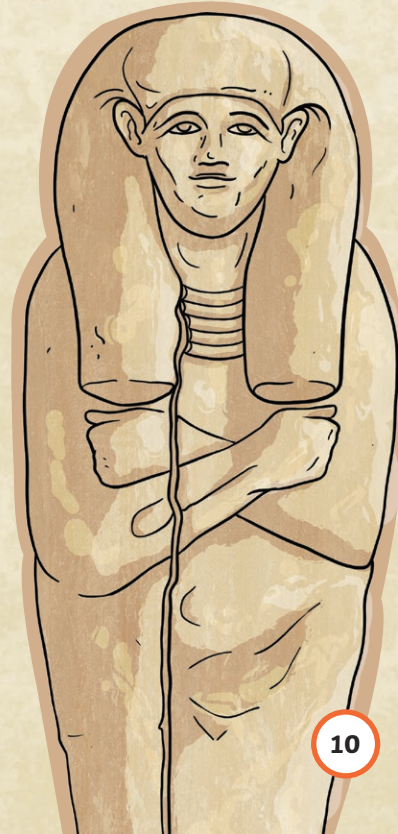
Greatest  
Achievement:  
Discovered **tomb** of  
Tutankhamun in 1922

An **archaeologist** is someone who studies the past by **excavating** sites and examining **artefacts** and natural remains that are found.

Carter was born in London but spent some of his childhood at his aunt's house in Norfolk. He was often unwell as a child so he was homeschooled. Howard Carter's father, Samuel John Carter, worked as a portrait painter and specialised in animal illustration – this is how Howard Carter developed his love of art.

One of his father's clients, William Tyssen-Amherst, had an impressive collection of **artefacts** from ancient Egypt, such as figurines carved from wood. When Howard accompanied his father to Amherst's home, he would delight in viewing the remarkable objects in Amherst's collection, which fuelled his interest in ancient Egypt.

You might wonder how a house in Norfolk came to have lots of precious **artefacts** from ancient Egyptian times. Wealthy enthusiasts would buy **artefacts** from other people but some, like Tyssen-Amherst, might have also funded **excavation** work in Egypt. Before the **independence** of Egypt was declared, many British people took the attitude of 'finders keepers' so when they found treasures in **colonised** countries, they took them for themselves.

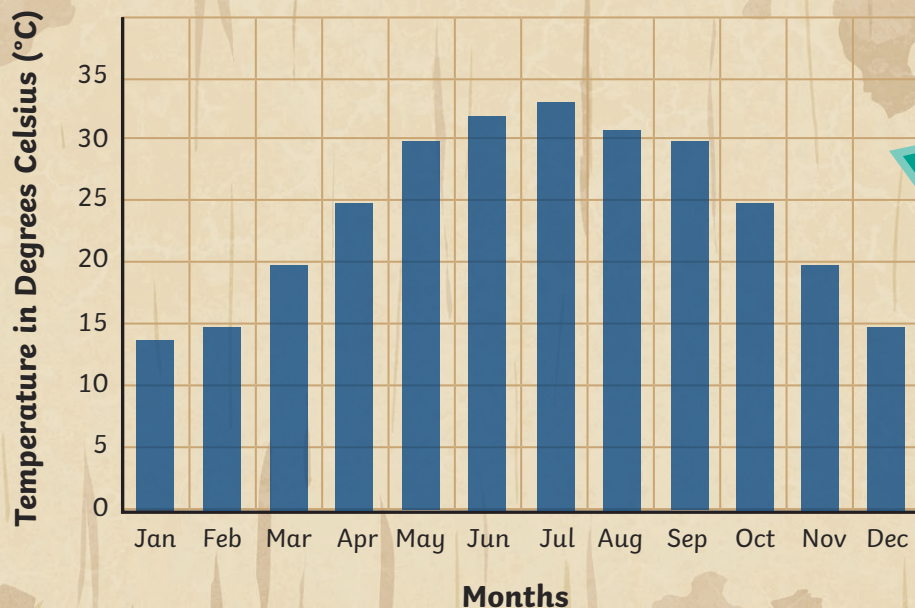


# The Hunt for Tutankhamun

Carnarvon successfully obtained the permit to dig in the Valley of the Kings. However, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 meant that the **excavation** work was put on hold, resuming again in 1917.

Carter's previous **excavation** projects working for Carnarvon had yielded many finds but Carter and his team dug for season after season and found nothing. Carnarvon started to think that Davis may have been right. Maybe there were no tombs left to find in the Valley of the Kings after all.

Monthly Average Temperatures in Luxor, Egypt



In 1922, Carnarvon called Carter back to England. Carter travelled to see Lord Carnarvon at his home at Highclere Castle.



While there, Carnarvon explained that he could not provide any more money for the search for Tutankhamun's **tomb**. Carter was desperate for Carnarvon to allow him to continue, so much so that he offered to use his own money to fund another season of digging. Carnarvon was eventually persuaded to fund Carter to carry out just one more season of digging before calling off the search. Carter returned to Egypt, keen to get started. He arrived in the Valley of the Kings on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1922.

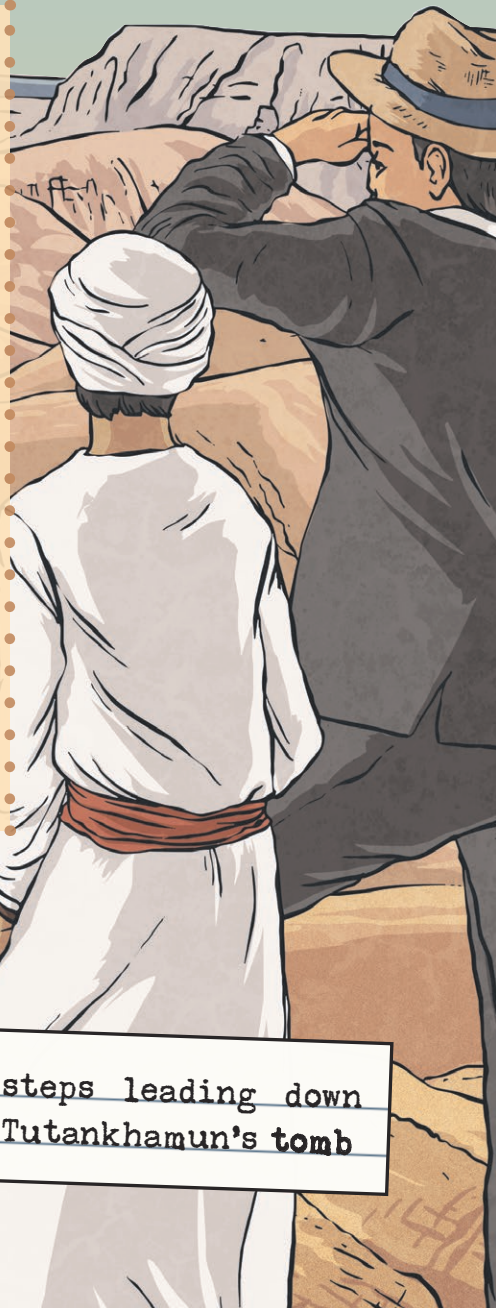
### Did You Know...



The climate in the Valley of the Kings is extremely hot. Digging in high temperatures would be too gruelling so **excavation** work took place in seasons. Carter started digging in November 1922 at the start of a new season and work carried on through the cooler months.

# First Steps to Discovery

Work resumed on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1922. Carter had decided to explore an area underneath some workers' huts. Only three days into the new digging season, what appeared to be a step in the ground was discovered. The widely accepted story of how this step was discovered is that an Egyptian boy, whose job it was to bring water to the workers on the team, discovered the step and Carter was then alerted. Before digging could begin, the area near the top step needed to be cleared of rubbish that had been dumped there.



The steps leading down into Tutankhamun's tomb

Howard Carter's diaries do not mention that it was the water boy who found the step. However, this famous photograph, taken a few years after the top step was discovered, is said to show him. Historians believe the boy was named Hussein Abdel-Rassoul.

His photograph was taken with him wearing a precious necklace found within the **tomb** of Tutankhamun because Carter said he played a special role in the **tomb's excavation**. Some believe this means he was the boy who found the steps.

Many Egyptian children worked on the dig. They fetched water for people working on the **excavation** or worked as 'basket boys', who lugged earth away from the **tomb** in baskets.



# Events of November 1922

**4<sup>th</sup> November:** Howard Carter's team discover the top of the steps to the tomb and rubbish is cleared away from the area all around the top step.

**5<sup>th</sup> November:** The steps are dug out. 16 steps leading downwards to a sealed door are found. Carter makes a small hole to peep through and can see rubble inside the passageway on the other side of the door.

Carter sees a royal seal but he does not see the seal of Tutankhamun at this point. It looks as if the tomb has been opened and then resealed.

The steps are filled back in with rubble and the site of the tomb is guarded day and night.

Carter sends a **telegram** to Lord Carnarvon, telling him that a tomb has been found and that they will wait until his arrival in Egypt before opening it.

**23<sup>rd</sup> November:** Lord Carnarvon and his daughter, Lady Evelyn, arrive in Egypt.

**25<sup>th</sup> November:** The first door to the tomb is opened and the rubble in the passageway is removed.

**26<sup>th</sup> November:** The door leading into the tomb is opened.

Carter must have been extremely excited when he sent the **telegram** to Lord Carnarvon. This is what the **telegram** said:

"At last have made wonderful discovery in the valley. A magnificent **tomb** with seals intact. Recovered same for your arrival. Congratulations."

Lord Carnarvon was keen to make arrangements to travel to Egypt as soon as possible.

Why do you think that might have been?

Did You Know...  
?

Today, you can fly from England to Egypt in around five hours. In 1922, this journey would have taken around two weeks!

**Answer:** He was very interested in the history of ancient Egypt and would have been very keen to find out what **artefacts** were inside the **tomb**. Prior to the discovery of the **tomb** of Tutankhamun, when the British had ruled in Egypt, the people who funded **excavation** projects like this would have been allowed a very generous share of the **artefacts** discovered and Egypt used to keep the rest. With this in mind, it was very likely that Carnarvon was eager to see what treasures were inside the **tomb**.

# Wonderful Things!

On 25<sup>th</sup> November 1922, the door at the bottom of the steps was opened and a passageway filled with **limestone** chips and rubble was revealed. Usually, a passageway filled with stones like this was designed to deter any **tomb** robbers who were hoping to quietly slip in and take any treasures from within.

Carter, Carnarvon, Lady Evelyn (Carnarvon's daughter) and the team had to wait patiently while the passageway was cleared of all the chips. This took all day and so it was not until the 26<sup>th</sup> November that another door was reached at the end of the passageway.

Carter described 26<sup>th</sup> November 1922 as "the day of days, the most wonderful that I have ever lived through, and certainly one whose like I can never hope to see again."

Carter made a small hole in the top left-hand corner of the door and stuck an iron rod through the hole. Candles were used to test for poisonous gases on the other side of the door so Carter put a candle through the hole and peered inside.

"I widened the breach and by means of the candle looked in, while Ld. C., Lady E, and Callender with the Reises waited in anxious expectation."

Arthur Callender was a key **archaeologist** on Carter's team and the 'Reises' that Carter refers to were Egyptian **excavators** or foremen (workers). They were highly skilled and knowledgeable about **archaeological** work in Egypt.



Carter's diaries do not specify which Egyptian excavators were present for this historic moment. However, we do know that two **excavators** named Hussein Abu Awad and Hussein Ahmed Said had worked with Carter before. A man named Ahmed Gerigar was in charge of the Egyptian excavating team so it is possible that they were present as well.

As Carter peered through the hole, Carnarvon asked if Carter could see anything. Carter's answer was eagerly awaited by the others and he is famously said to have replied, "Yes, wonderful things!"

# Peering Into the Antechamber

Carter made the hole bigger so that he and Carnarvon could both look through to see the contents of the room as an electric torch was shone into the antechamber.

Those that peered through the hole saw a room crammed full of objects – there were rich treasures scattered among other everyday things.



What do you think Howard Carter was thinking as he gazed at the treasures from ancient Egyptian times?

What do you think the Egyptian **excavators** were thinking at this moment? Do you think everyone had a chance to peer through the hole?

Carter wrote in his diary that at this point, having peered through the hole in the wall, the hole was then closed up and the group went home. It also says that the Egyptian Antiquities Service was informed and the next day, once Callender had arranged for strong electric lamps to be put up, the group then had a proper look around at the magnificent objects within the antechamber.



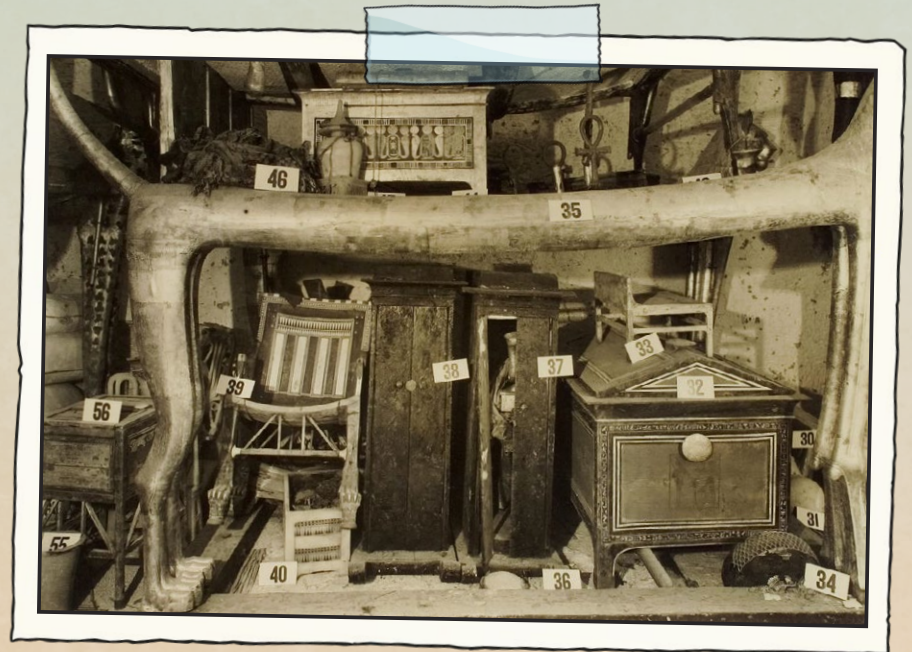
# Emptying the Antechamber

It was vital that the **artefacts** were documented in a scientific manner so Carter did not rush the enormous task ahead. Carter went to Cairo to buy all the items he would need to document the **artefacts**. The **tomb** was then filled in again with rubble to make it secure against robbers. The **tomb** was not opened up again until 16<sup>th</sup> December. Carter and his team took photographs of every object, systematically recorded details about them, added preservatives and moved them safely to an empty **tomb** close by.



Everything was removed from the antechamber, apart from the **sentinel** figures, which guarded the sealed door. Carter felt it would have been disrespectful to remove these.

## Emptying the Antechamber



In Carnarvon's original permit to **excavate** in the Valley of the Kings, the terms stated that if an intact **tomb** containing a **mummy** were to be found, absolutely all the contents would become the property of Egyptian museums. However, it also said if the **tomb** had previously been opened and looted, there would be some share of the treasures for the person funding the **excavation**, as compensation for their time and expense.

Carter's diary makes several references to evidence that **tomb** robbers had already entered the **tomb** back in ancient Egyptian times. It was thought that the robbers must have been disturbed due to the fact that they seemed to have taken so little.

# Treasures From the Tomb

Here are some of the thousands of **artefacts** found in the **tomb**. They provide a fascinating insight into what life was like in ancient Egypt.

One of many intricately decorated caskets found in the **tomb**. The knobs are made from volcanic glass.



These torch-holders are made from gold and bronze and the bases are wooden.

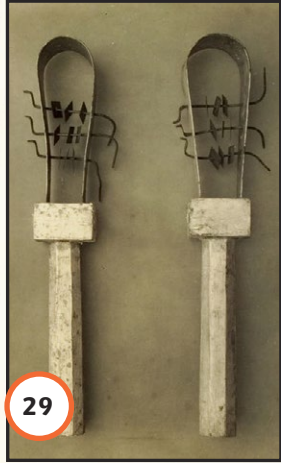


This shows two sistra made from wood and bronze. A sistrum was a percussion instrument which was believed to have magical powers in ancient Egyptian times.

The King's sceptre



The pharaoh's golden throne



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## Treasures From the Tomb

This shows a mannequin of **Pharaoh** Tutankhamun made from painted wood. Historians believe that when Tutankhamun was alive, it would have been used for hanging the king's clothing or jewellery on.



A bouquet from the burial of Tutankhamun



This was Tutankhamun's bed, which was made from **ebony**.



Linen gloves

This shows a couch in the image of the ancient Egyptian goddess Tauret (also known as Thoueris).



Did You Know...

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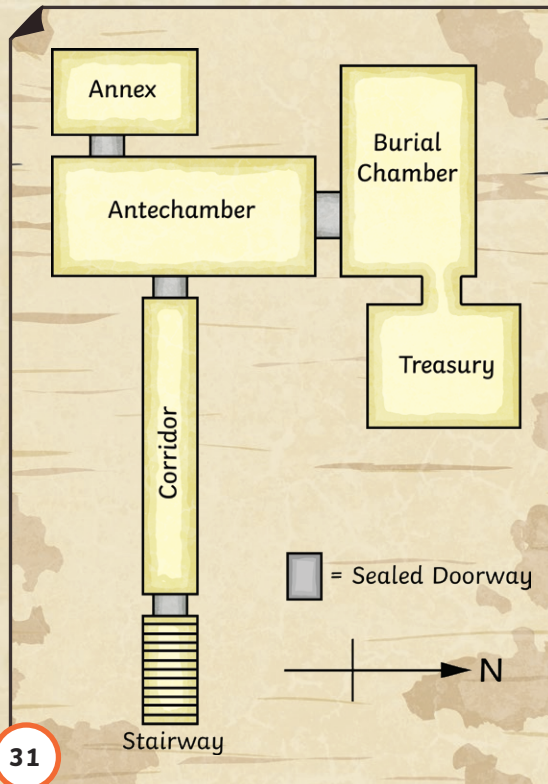
The ancient Egyptian goddess Tauret had the head of a hippopotamus, the claws of a lion and the tail of a crocodile.

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# Opening the Burial Chamber

It was the middle of February 1923 before Carter and his team had cleared the antechamber of all the objects.

On 16<sup>th</sup> February 1923, Carter, Carnarvon, Lady Evelyn and a small group of invited people gathered for the opening of the **burial chamber**. Among these were several English and American **archaeologists** and officials from the Egyptian Antiquities Service.

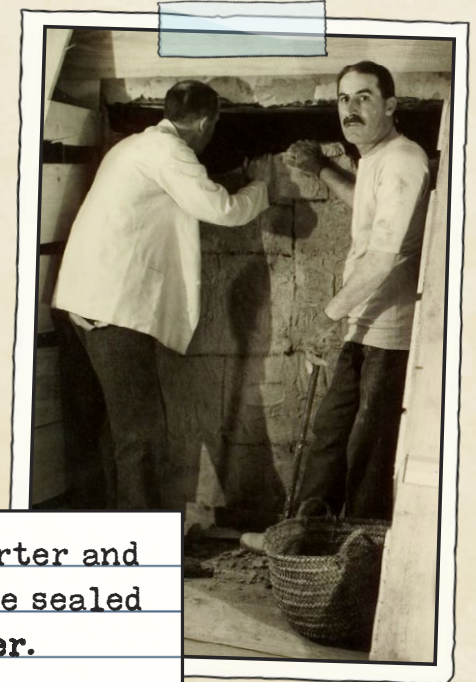


At a significant moment in the history of Egypt, when the long-hidden **tomb** was about to be opened, only a very small number of those present were Egyptian.

Floor plan of the tomb of Tutankhamun

Carter and his trusted colleagues, Mace and Callender, chipped carefully at the door for hours, taking care as they worked to preserve features of the doorframe.

Once a hole big enough for people to climb through was made, members of the group were able to enter just three at a time, as the space inside the **burial chamber** was limited. Carter went first with Lord Carnarvon and Pierre Lacau, who was Egypt's Director of Antiquities.



This photograph shows Carter and Carnarvon standing by the sealed door to the **burial chamber**.

What must it have felt like for those people to stand in a **burial chamber** which had been undisturbed for thousands of years, gazing at the many treasures inside, the richly painted walls and the sealed **shrine** of a great **pharaoh**?

How do you think the population of Egypt must have felt that at this historic moment, hardly any Egyptian people were there to be the first to enter the **burial chamber** of their own ancient **pharaoh**?

# The Pharaoh's Curse

When Carter **excavated** Tutankhamun's **tomb**, a big story in the newspapers was that there could be a **mummy's** curse! It intrigued people to think a curse had been cast and would bring death, ill health or bad luck to those who disturbed the burial place of a **pharaoh**.

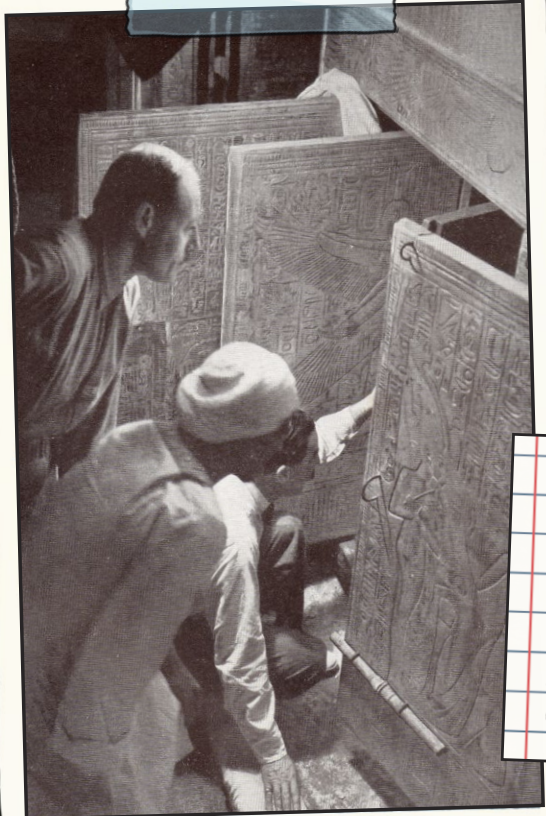
Whenever something bad happened to anyone who was present at the opening of the **tomb**, the news would spread around the world as evidence that there may have been a curse on the **tomb** of Tutankhamun.

Carter, Callender and an unknown Egyptian **excavator** re-enact the opening of the **tomb** for a photograph opportunity.

Some claimed that Lord Carnarvon died because of the curse. He was bitten by a mosquito a short time after the official opening of the **burial chamber**. He later cut the bite when shaving and it caused a dreadful infection. He died of **pneumonia** and blood poisoning on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1923.

There were others involved in the opening of the **tomb** who also died in the years following but the majority of people with a link to the project went on to live long lives.

Many people argue that if the curse was going to be targeted at anyone, then it would most likely be at Carter himself; he was the person who led the excavation and removed the **mummy** from the **sarcophagus**. Carter went on to live for many years after the discovery of the **tomb**.



# Timeline of the Discovery and Excavation of the Tomb

1914

.....○ Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter acquire a licence to dig in the Valley of the Kings.

.....○ **Excavations** are put on hold due to the First World War.

1917

.....○ **Excavations** begin again.

1922

.....○ Carnarvon threatens to halt the **excavations** but Carter persuades him to let the work continue for one more season.

.....○ **4<sup>th</sup> November**  
The steps to the **tomb** are discovered and a **telegram** is sent to Carnarvon in England, telling him to come to Egypt.

.....○ **25<sup>th</sup> November**  
The **tomb** is opened.

## Timeline of the Discovery and Excavation of the Tomb

1922

.....○ **29<sup>th</sup> November**  
Official opening of the **tomb**. The world is told about the discovery.

.....○ **27<sup>th</sup> December**  
The first item is removed from the antechamber.

1923

.....○ **16<sup>th</sup> February**  
The **burial chamber** is opened.

.....○ **5<sup>th</sup> April**  
Lord Carnarvon dies.

1925

.....○ The coffins are opened one at a time to eventually get to the **mummy**.

1930

.....○ The last item is removed from the **tomb**.

1939

.....○ **2<sup>nd</sup> March**  
Carter dies aged 69. He is buried in Putney Vale Cemetery in London.