



SCOTLAND

Ancient Egyptian

**burial site opens
£80 million museum
redevelopment**



In 1908, the celebrated archaeologist Flinders Petrie discovered what is considered to be the largest group of gold work ever to have left Egypt, at the undisturbed ancient burial site Qurna, in Thebes.

It was, said Petrie in a letter dated 18 January 1909, "a perfect burial of about the XVII dynasty."

One hundred-and-eleven years later, artefacts from that find and hundreds of others have gone on display at the National Museum of Scotland to mark the completion of a 15-year, £80 million redevelopment.

The Qurna burial is believed to be from late 17th or early 18th dynasty, 250 years before Tutankhamen was buried, and is thought to be the only intact Royal burial group on display outside Egypt. It provides a fascinating insight into the burials and coffins of the day.

The Royal site was discovered in the first valley to the north of the road to the Valley of the Kings, around six weeks after Petrie and his team arrived in Thebes. It contained a large number of items, including the coffin of a mummified body of a slender woman, around five feet tall, aged about 18-25, believed to be a queen or princess. The mummy wore a magnificent collar of gold rings, a pair of earrings made from 95% pure gold, two pairs of gold bracelets and a girdle of fine electrum rings as well as a scarab and an electrum button.

With her was the white-painted rectangular coffin of a 2-3-year-old child. The child's mummified body wore a necklace of gold rings, a pair of gold earrings, a girdle and pair of anklets made from blue-glazed rings, and three ivory bangles, two on the left arm and one on the right.

There is no inscription naming the woman and child, but strong signs they were members of the Royal family at Thebes.

The grave was excavated in an area where other Royal burials had already been found, the grave goods indicate wealth and the length of the inscription is so long that it suggests being interpreted as "King's Great Wife".

Experts at the National Museum housed in Edinburgh - and the most popular UK museum outside London

- said the burial also suggested a connection with Nubia. Some of her grave goods could be gifts from a Nubian ruler to the Theban Royal family. The woman could have been ethnically Egyptian or from many other ethnic backgrounds. Alternatively, she could have been a Nubian princess given as a wife to the King of Thebes.

The opening of the Ancient Egypt gallery, along with two others dedicated to East Asia and the Art of Ceramics, coincides with the 200th anniversary of the first ancient Egyptian objects entering National Museums Scotland's collections. Over 1300 objects have been selected for the galleries, 40% of which go on display for the first time in generations.

It showcases, chronologically, 4,000 years of history for the first time, and includes items discovered by the Scottish archaeologist Alexander Henry Rhind, who travelled to Egypt in the winters of 1855-1857 and was the first archaeologist to work in Egypt, as well as being heralded as a pioneer of excavation and recording.

It throws up some interesting information on how burials took place, including a trend at the time for people to have their loved ones' portraits painted onto the coffin lid.

Other items that have gone on show include:-

- female coffin: an exceptionally tall coffin with decoration in the rishi-style. The lid has feathered patterning painted in blue with black details on a yellow ground. The owner's face is framed by a striped linen nemes-cloth, a beaded collar with falcon terminals, and a vulture-pectoral;
- lid for an anthropoid wooden coffin, plastered and painted, of a child, Tairtsekher, daughter of Irtnefret: Ancient Egyptian, possibly from Deir el-Medina, New Kingdom, early 19th Dynasty, c.1292-1200 BC;
- mummy-mask of gilded and painted linen and plaster cartonnage, depicting Montsuef wearing a lappet-wig: Ancient Egyptian, excavated by A.H. Rhind in the tomb of Montsuef at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Thebes, Early Roman Period, c.9BC;

- double coffin of two half-brothers, Petamun and Penhorpabik: Ancient Egyptian, Upper Egypt, Thebes, late Roman Period, c.175-200 AD. The exterior shows images of the two boys whose funeral papyri record they were Penhorpabik who was just three years and three months when he died, and Petamun who was younger. The interior shows two painted sky goddesses who would escort them to the afterlife.

Bruce Minto, Chair of National Museums Scotland, said the opening of the galleries was "a truly historic moment in the life of a great museum", adding: "Our outstanding collections help us to tell a vast range of diverse and fascinating stories from across the globe."



Extract from a letter from Flinders Petrie to an unnamed recipient:- ▼

"We have been about six weeks at Thebes. Our main purpose was to search the northern valleys, where it is reported that there might be tombs. We settled therefore at a small hill north of the road up to the Kings Tombs where some rock-tombs served for our workmen and my wife and myself, while some brick huts were built for dining rooms and bedrooms.

"Though we have cut innumerable trenches about the valleys, and on one spot kept 24 men and boys for over a month, yet only one tomb has been found in the desert valleys. That is a perfect burial of about the XVII dynasty. There was no valuable article in it, but the whole was an unusual and good group.

"A coffin of the Aahmen style, ten pots in beautifully made string mats, most of which have more or less preserved with collodian. A blue marble dish with four apes. A horn with ivory bird-head spout. An obsidian and an alabaster khol pot of fine work. Two bead net pouches with handles. A head rest with inlaid stem of ivory and ebony. Two baskets, and sundry..."