

Redland Past Revisited for the Redland Directory - No. 11

‘Egyptian Curse or Urban Myth?’ ©Julian Lea-Jones. Mar 2008

Amelia Edwards, novelist and protégé of Dickens, lived at Westbury-on-Trym, where a plaque testifies to her importance to Egyptology. In the 1870s Amelia took a unplanned holiday in Egypt, described in her book, ‘1000 miles up the Nile’. She then decided to devote her life to Egyptology which she helped to establish on scientific principles with proper funding. Jumping to the 1900s we learn about another unplanned event, a motor accident that injured 34 year old George Edward Stanhope Molyneux Herbert. During his convalescence he developed an interest in Egypt and became a colleague of Howard Carter and main backer for his investigations in the Valley of the Kings. On the day of their momentous discovery of Tutenkhamon’s tomb, Carter’s pet canary was eaten by a cobra. This ‘omen’ terrified their workers who saw it as evidence of the pharaoh’s curse. Within five months Herbert was dead of an infected mosquito bite and the media circus began. Every subsequent death, however loosely related, was seen as evidence of the curse. But what of Howard Carter who opened the tomb, the expected focus? He died fifteen years later of natural causes, - curse or another urban myth? And the link with Redland? George Herbert, Carter’s colleague and backer was Lord Carnarvon, the 5th Earl, after whom Carnarvon Road was named.

Lastly, what of the lady who started it, Amelia Edwards? Her memorial in the form of an Egyptian Ankh can be seen Henbury Churchyard.

