

The Cullinan Diamond

Background

If you tried to imagine a single diamond larger than a human fist, you would not be dreaming. You would actually be thinking of the largest raw diamond ever unearthed: the Cullinan Diamond. This massive treasure was found in 1905 – accidentally – by the foreman of the Cullinan Mine in South Africa, Frederick Wells, during a routine inspection. He was eighteen feet underground when he looked up and saw something white embedded in the tunnel wall. They dug it out, and it looked like a large piece of frosted carnival glass. In fact, it was most incredible gemological find in history, a 3,106-carat diamond!



The Transvaal Colony where the mine was located purchased the diamond

from Sir Thomas Cullinan, the mine's owner, for the equivalent of \$20.7 million today. In 1907, their government presented it as a gift to the reigning British Monarch, King Edward VII, for his 66th birthday.

Fascinating Details

A Dutch jeweler, Joseph Asscher, was chosen to cut the stone. He bent a steel cutting tool on his first attempt to split it. He made a successful cut on the second try and eventually split the rock into nine pieces (see below) for the royal family, of which the largest two finished gems took their places in the British Crown Jewels. The other seven are privately owned by the British royal family. These accounted for a little over one-third of the overall stone.

There is an urban legend that Asscher fainted after he made the first cut (who wouldn't?), but a friend said he probably opened a bottle of champagne instead! Still, his work was not done; Asscher cut the remainder of the huge diamond into 97 smaller stones,

which were sold to royalty and other wealthy individuals around the world. Imagine owning a piece of a rock that Mother Nature had formed in the depths of the earth *1.8 billion* years ago!

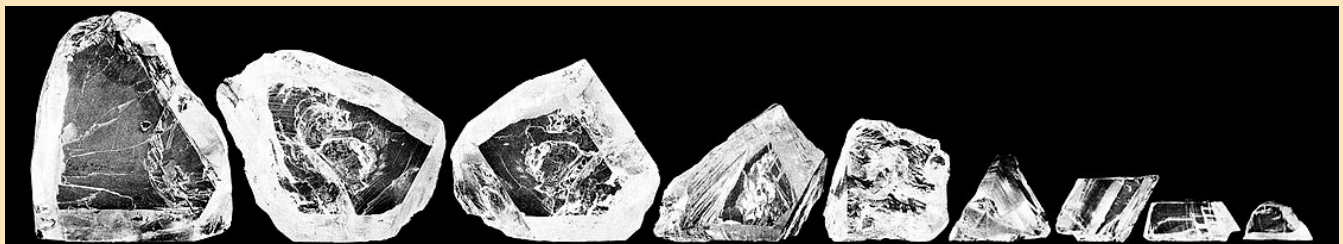


Credits: Allamy

Credits: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Facet Facts

- 3,106 carats (681 g) = 1 lb. 6 oz., about the weight of a large coconut without the husk; its dimensions before cutting were 4 inches long, 2.5 inches wide, and 2.3 inches deep;
- For comparison, the next largest raw diamond ever unearthed (the Sewelô, in Botswana, 2019) was only 1,758 carats;
- The **Great Star of Africa** is the largest Cullinan gem produced from the uncut stone; it is 530 carats (pear shaped) and was incorporated into the Sovereign's Scepter with Cross (above left);
- The next largest Cullinan gem, the **Second Star of Africa** (317 carats, cushion shaped), was incorporated into the Imperial State Crown (above right).



Credits: Wikimedia Commons