

Artefact: The Amesbury Archer

Date: Late Neolithic

Location found: Boscombe Down, Amesbury, Wiltshire

Description: Skeleton of a man known as the 'Amesbury Archer'

The Amesbury Archer is the richest Beaker burial in Britain. It contained over 190 artefacts including copper knives, gold hair tresses, sandstone wrist guards, flint arrowheads and five Beakers.

The burial

The Archer was buried on his left-hand side with his face to the north, and his legs bent. His grave was large and rectangular in shape and probably had a timber lining. It may have been covered by a round barrow.

On his forearm there was a wrist guard, used to protect his arm from the recoil of his longbow. Next to this was a bone pin that may have secured a piece of clothing such as a leather cloak or mantle. Partly covered by his torso was a copper knife which may have been worn in a sheath on the chest.

Close to the man's face were two Beaker pots, a red deer spatula, boars' tusks, some flints, and a small tanged copper knife (a tang is a protrusion which is used to fix the blade to the shaft). These finds are likely to have been in a small organic bag or container. Two more Beaker pots lay at the man's feet. By his knees there was another wrist guard, a small tanged copper knife, a shale belt ring, and a pair of 'basket earrings.'

The Archer

The Amesbury Archer had a sturdy body structure, but he had an abscess on his jaw and had suffered an accident a few years before his death that had ripped his left knee cap off. As a result, he walked with a limp. He was suffering from an infection in his bones which would have caused him constant pain. Evidence from Oxygen Isotope Analysis indicates that the Amesbury Archer originally came from the Alpine region of Europe, probably Switzerland. He died at 35-45 years old.

One of the objects he was discovered with may have been a small anvil, and it has been suggested that he introduced metal working to Britain. This would have given him great wealth and prestige. The Archer was quickly dubbed the 'King of Stonehenge' in the British press, due to the proximity of the famous monument, and some have even claimed he may have been involved in its construction.

The Archer is an example of people bringing the Beaker culture from over seas with its distinctive pottery and the first copper and gold objects. The enormous wealth of the goods in his grave reveals the growing differences in wealth and society at this time.

Further reading:

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefact: Bowerchalke Coin Hoard

Date: Iron Age

Location found: East Chase Farm, Bowerchalke

Description: Iron Age coin hoard in superb condition

The hoard

The Bowerchalke Coin Hoard was found by metal detectorists. The obverse faces of the coins depict the laureated portrait of Apollo. Apollo was often used on Greek staters because Macedonian kings liked to demonstrate a close association with the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi.

The reverse sides of the coins display a disjointed horse with pellets surrounding it which could be interpreted as stars. The coins may have been used by the Durotriges, a Celtic tribe that lived in South Wiltshire and Dorset before the Roman occupation.

Ancient money

One of the main causes for the increase and need for money during the ancient times, is likely to be the occurrence of warfare. Standardised and guaranteed units of value could greatly facilitate the funding of equipment, resources, payment and travel during this time.

Gold coins were scarce because the value of the coin was determined by the amount of precious metal they contained. Archaeologically, gold coins do not tend to travel far from the source where they were produced.

Staters originated in Ancient Greece, where employed Celtic mercenaries would have received coins as payment, or in some cases they may have been collected or stolen. When back in Britain, the Celts began to produce their own local copies, with slight adaptations depending on local preferences.

The Treasure Act

The introduction of the Treasure Act (1996), means that the hoard was determined lawfully as treasure. Key points that determine treasure are: objects other than coins must contain at least 10% gold or silver and must be at least 300 years old, coins must be at least 300 years old and consist of a single deposit consisting of more than ten.

Further reading:

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefact: Downton Mosaic

Date: Roman

Location found: Downton, Wiltshire

Description: A section of mosaic from an excavation of a Roman villa at Downton, Wiltshire conducted during the 1950s.

The Downton Mosaic depicts a vessel with two fish for handles. It formed part of the floor of a room that may have been a dining room and is the most elaborate mosaic floor discovered in the excavation of a Roman villa at Downton. Other features were only partially excavated, but included a large corn drying oven, a possible well, minor buildings and drainage ditches. The Roman features extend over an area of about 12 acres.

The excavation

The site of the villa was discovered 1953 and was excavated in 1955 -1956, in advance of a housing development. It was a two unit villa, possibly used for seasonal purposes. All the floors were tessellated with at least two featuring mosaics, a hypocaust and bath house. When excavated the tessellated floor was raised section by section surrounded by boards and latex which were affixed to the tesserae.

The villa and its rooms face West for the view of the Avon Valley. It is thought that the villa would have controlled a large farming estate. It has been dated to the late third, or early fourth century AD.

Roman mosaics

Romans made mosaics as a way of decorating and creating background texture for images. Mosaic floors represented wealth and decorated rich peoples' homes as well as government offices and places of worship. Large ranges of materials were used including pebbles, terra cotta tiles, pumice stone, sea shells, marbles and even coloured glass and gold leaf. Geometric patterns could range from simple to complex three dimensional effects.

The themes would often be inspired by mythical creatures and stories. Roman goddesses of arts (otherwise known as muses) would dance and sing around fountains and other water features. They were known to meet for their song and dance. It is probable that the very name *mosaic* comes from the Roman name for this type of work "Opus Musivum" which was itself inspired by the Muses.

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefact: Gneiss macehead

Date: Late Neolithic (2200 - 3000 BC)

Location found: Stonehenge

Description: A Neolithic mace head that is perforated and has been highly polished.

The Gneiss macehead is significant because it is made of a rock called Gneiss that is not found locally and is likely to have been bought from either Scotland or Brittany.

It was found by Lieutenant-Colonel William Hawley (1851–1941), a British archaeologist whose work focused on excavating the foundations of Stonehenge in the early 1920s. The confusing stratigraphy made work difficult but Hawley was able to make numerous breakthroughs regarding the history of activity at the site including the discovery of many of the human remains which first indicated a funerary role for Stonehenge.

The Aubrey Holes

The macehead has been attributed to a cremation burial in the Aubrey Holes, a ring of fifty-six chalk pits at Stonehenge named after the seventeenth century antiquarian John Aubrey. This suggests the burial occurred very early in the development of Stonehenge, and the Aubrey Holes may have originally acted as a cemetery. The Aubrey holes date to the earliest phases of Stonehenge in the late fourth and early third millennium BC.

The pits appear to have been refilled with the freshly excavated chalk rubble soon after they were dug as no weathering has been noted on the chalk sides of the pits. They may also have been dug out and refilled numerous times. It has been suggested that the Aubrey Holes were originally intended to be postholes containing timbers or stones but this is uncertain.

A high status object

The macehead is significant because it has been highly polished. This highlights the layers, or foliations, of alternating darker and lighter colours, called gneissic banding. It shows little evidence of use and was probably intended for a person of higher status.

A mace is a blunt weapon, a type of club that uses a heavy head on the end of a handle to deliver powerful blows. They typically consist of a strong heavy shaft, featuring a head made of stone, copper, bronze, iron, or steel. The length can vary considerably, depending on the size of the user.

The problem with early maces was that their stone heads shattered easily and it was difficult to fix the head to the wooden handle reliably.

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefact: Jadeite Axe

Date: Early Neolithic

Description: Highly polished Jadeite axe

Location found: May have been found beneath a barrow near Stonehenge

This rare and beautiful Neolithic Axe is made from Jadeite, a stone found in the Western Alps. It has a thin pointed oval section and pointed butt. The stone has been made smooth through as much as a thousand hours polishing using another stone. Its perfect condition indicates that it was never used, suggesting it was a ceremonial rather than functional item.

Due to vague antiquarian recording, not a lot of information is available on the original excavator, the axe head, or the exact date and location of its discovery. However, it is thought it may have been found beneath a barrow near Stonehenge.

An object of prestige

Jadeite axes were quarried in extremely inaccessible environments where blocks of raw material would have required laborious long distance transportation. Their manufacture was difficult as jadeite's matrixes of prismatic crystals make it difficult to break. This piece must have been brought across to Britain by boat.

The beauty of the axe, and the great distance it had been carried, would have increased its prestige among local communities. When considering the Mohs scale of mineral hardness, diamond is maximum (10.0), and jadeite ranges around 6.5-7.0 (harder than a steel knife blade).

It is thought that Neolithic peoples considered certain stones sourced from difficult to reach places, such as high up mountains, to have special supernatural powers.

Jadeite's color commonly ranges from white through pale apple green to deep jade green but can also be blue-green, pink, lavender and a multitude of other rare colors. This axe is a very dark green to black variety of Jadeite called eclogite and came from a quarry near Mount Visco in the Italian Alps.

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefact: Monkton Deverill Torc

Date: Bronze Age

Location found: Monkton Deverill, Wiltshire

Description: An extremely fine example of gold torc from the Bronze Age.

The torc was discovered in a hole cut into the silting of the ditch of a Bronze Age burial mound, by a metal detectorist. It is made of a single gold bar that has been twisted, and then doubled back onto itself twice to form three strands. It was discovered next to a Copper Alloy Palstave Axe.

The torc was the subject of a long and costly process of litigation to determine whether it was treasure trove, which at the time was determined by whether the object had been buried deliberately (treasure) or was an accidental loss or votive deposit (not treasure). It was finally declared treasure in 1993 and was bought by the museum.

The definition of treasure has since been changed and now includes:

- Any metallic object, other than a coin, provided that at least 10% by weight is precious metal (gold or silver) and that it is at least 300 years old when found.
- Any group of two or more metallic objects of any composition of prehistoric date that come from the same find.
- All coins from the same find provided they are at least 300 years old when found. If the coins contain less than 10% of gold or silver there must be at least ten of them.
- Any object, whatever it is made of, that is found in the same place as, or had previously been together with, another object that is Treasure.
- Any object that would previously have been Treasure Trove, but does not fall within the specific categories given above.

In the context of battle, torcs become symbols for strength and attributes of authority, probably because they are often so large, heavy and eye catching. Torcs also served as the spoil after battle if the opposing army was defeated. By taking a torc from a fallen warrior the strength had been captured and the new owner would gain it all.

In addition to serving as ritual offerings and as intimidators in battle, gold torcs also functioned as emblems of royalty (the lesser people decorated themselves with bronze). Torcs from earlier centuries were typically found in womens' graves. This example is fine, and therefore is likely to have been worn by a princess, whereas heavier ones would have been worn by warriors. In descriptions of Boudicca, the (Queen of Iceni), writers often emphasized her 'great twisted golden necklace' because they were struck by this symbol of force.

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefacts: Iron Age/ Roman New Forest pottery types

Date: Approximately AD 260- 370

Location found: New Forest

Description: New Forest pottery displaying different types of vessels and wares.

This selection of Roman New Forest pottery includes imitation Samian ware, mortaria (a bowl for mixing and grinding), and fine colour coated table wear. The colours vary from a matt red to a lustrous purple, depending on whether they were fired at a comparatively low or high temperature.

All New Forest pottery appears to have been wheel turned. Common types of pottery include beakers, flasks, jugs and flagons, bowls and beakers (particularly the indented beaker).

Evidence of this industrial activity is to be found clustered most notably in the North of the Forest at Islands Thorns, Amberwood and Sloden Enclosures. This type of pottery is unique to Southern Britain and was established by the Romans. The Romans established a very large system of pottery sites, and New Forest pottery can be seen at all Roman locations in Southern Britain.

In the first and second centuries AD, the Romans cultivated larger areas of land including the keeping of cattle and livestock in the New Forest. By 300 AD, a pottery industry was well established.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the New Forest did not have a large population before or during the Roman period. This may be because intensive settlement, forest clearance and cultivation in the Neolithic and Bronze Age meant that the soil was no longer suitable for agriculture.

This lack of people and the plentiful local supplies of clay and sand were probably important factors in the creation of the pottery industry. The design of the pottery kilns in the New Forest is unique in Britain at this time, as there was no pre-existing local industry.

They are characteristically built from yellow puddled clay and surrounded by black burnt earth, which indicates the oven, when fired was domed with wattle. This raises intriguing questions about where their initial design came from as the closest parallels are North Eastern France and West Germany.

Further reading:

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefact: Pitt Rivers Craniometer

Date: Late Nineteenth century

Description: The craniometer was designed by Pitt Rivers. It was an experimental machine, designed to understand whether skull shape was a racial and intelligence indicator.

Constructed in the nineteenth century and designed by Pitt Rivers, this object is of significance because it is a unique instrument, and offered new ways of archaeologically recording and measuring skulls. The instrument was originally created because Pitt Rivers did not believe skull photography was an accurate enough method of comparison. The instrument is made of Aluminum and the legs are removable so as it can be light enough for use with a living subject

The Craniometer

The skulls would be held in place by a blunt point placed into the ear openings on either side, which although oval, retained a sturdy grip. This enabled the skull to revolve on a single point.

The scale is recorded in millimetres engraved on a horizontal bar, which is moved by a screw. This enabled the distance on the vertical plane between the centre of the ear canal and any point on the profile of the skull to be measured with great precision. The measurements along the profile are taken with a pair of compasses.

Space is allowed within the instrument to push the skull to either side so as to bring any point on the side of the skull inline with the horizontal bar. To help this process calipers were made inspired by Sir W. Flowers calipers, but with the upper bar movable by a screw, so as to read off the distance between any fixed point of the profile and any point on the side of the skull, taken from the central plane.

These measurements can then be used to compare different skulls. This instrument was most commonly used on bodies discovered at Bokerly Dyke in Dorset and Wor Barrow.

Pitt Rivers was not content merely to dig sites and record the bare facts of his discoveries, he wanted to extract the maximum amount of information from his material. All of the human bones that he excavated were examined and measured:

'I have contrived a craniometer...which shows the profile of the skulls with perfect accuracy...' (Published address to Royal Archaeological Institute Dorchester, Archaeological Journal 1897).

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefact: Leg Shackles

Date: Norman

Location found: Old Sarum, Wiltshire

Description: Norman leg shackles found on the legs of a decapitated male skeleton at Old Sarum

These Norman leg shackles were discovered buried beneath the high altar at Old Sarum on the legs of a decapitated male skeleton.

The skeleton is thought to have been beheaded before it was buried. It is not recorded who the skeleton was, or why the body was buried beneath a high altar.

The burial is strange because the body had been decapitated, which suggests the individual committed a crime but was then buried beneath the high altar which is a place of great status. These shackles would have been hammered closed, causing restraint and great discomfort to the person wearing them.

William D'Eu

It has been suggested that the victim may have been William D' Eu, a first generation Anglo-Norman aristocrat who rebelled against the king, but there is no scientific evidence to back this up.

William D' Eu's first rebellion began in 1088, and although caught he managed to make peace with the king. He rebelled again in 1095. The Anglo Saxon Chronicle states:

"Geoffery Bainard accused William d'Eu, the Kings kinsman, of treason and maintained his charge in single combat: and William being vanquished, the King ordered him to be blinded and emasculated"

During January 1097 in Salisbury, William was formally accused of treason, challenged to trial by battle and was defeated by Geoffrey Baynard, former High Sheriff of Yorkshire. It was finally decided that William was to be blinded and mutilated. He died sometime later.

Although it is quite likely that it is William's skeleton that was found under the high altar at Old Sarum, other reports suggest he was buried at Hastings.

Further reading:

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefact: Warminster Jewel

Date: Anglo-Saxon (Ninth Century)

Location found: Field located near Cley Hill, Warminster

Description: Rare Anglo-Saxon aestel or manuscript pointer

One of only seven known to exist, this aestel or manuscript pointer was discovered by a metal detectorist. The jewel is made from rock crystal and set in a beaded wire frame of gold. At the centre there is a domed jewel of either blue glass or a Lapis Lazuli cabochon (a gemstone that has been shaped and polished). The gold shaft would have held an ivory or wooden pointer to be used as an aid for reading. The flat back allows the pointer to lie upon texts.

The Warminster Jewel's construction may have been ordered by Alfred the Great, King of Wessex (871- 899 AD). Alfred sent aestels to all the dioceses in his kingdom to accompany his translation of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care*. The most famous example is the Alfred Jewel in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. All aestels include gold which may be a sign of royal patronage as it was a metal that was difficult to obtain in the ninth century.

Alfred the Great

Alfred the Great was born in 849 AD in Wantage in the most southerly of the four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. He became king of Wessex in 871 and was the only Anglo-Saxon ruler to survive the Viking attacks of the next few years. Alfred had a love of books, which was unusual for a king at this time, and during his thirties he began to study Latin texts.

The aestel is a symbol of Alfred the Great's desire to encourage spiritual learning throughout his kingdom and he may have sent these to bishops in the hope that they would use them to improve peoples reading. Seven aestels have been discovered in total. Six have been found in Wessex, but the seventh aestel was discovered in Norway at a chieftain's hall in the Lofoten islands. The gift of the aestel reinforced the importance of the king but also set up an obligation for the people to earn their rewards by teaching reading.

The acquisition of the Warminster Jewel was made possible with the help of Wiltshire County Council and its purchase was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, The Art Fund, the V&A Purchase Grant fund and the L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation.

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Wessex Gallery Key Artefact

Artefact: Dog skeleton

Date: Neolithic - Early Bronze Age

Location found: Easton Down, Winterslow, Wiltshire

Description: The skeleton of a fox terrier type dog

The excavation

The dog skeleton was discovered in a circular pit during an excavation at Easton Down in Wiltshire in the 1930s. The skeleton was in a 'sleeping position' with its head resting on its front paws, hind legs curled up and its tail between its legs. The pit was just over a 37 cm (15") deep and the dog skeleton was discovered just above the base of the pit in a layer of condensed bone ash and a few flint flakes. Also in the pit one sherd of beaker was discovered as well as a few small flint flakes and some animal bones.

The excavation of Easton Down revealed a Neolithic flint mining site with evidence for later Neolithic and early Bronze Age activity. The site was discovered in 1929, and extensive excavations were undertaken in the vicinity from 1930 to 1934, examining several other features such as barrows in addition to the mining site.

Type of dog

The skeletal structure and measurements are close in resemblance to a modern fox terrier breed of dog. These comparisons came from measuring the hind bones and the fore limbs. The prehistoric bones measure slightly longer than the present, but the lower dimensions of the jaw, and teeth are almost exact in comparison.

The skeletal measurements of this skeleton are very similar to two other comparable examples from the same time period excavated at Windmill Hill and Grimes Graves. The shoulder heights of small prehistoric dogs are presently accepted to vary around 35-49 cm (14-19") at shoulder height. They were often buried with their owners.

An unusual find

Complete Neolithic animal skeletons are unusual and rare. The reason for potential burial is unknown. Evidence for domesticated dogs during these time periods are indicated by gnawing marks on bones at village sites. It is believed that Neolithic dogs were used for help during hunting and herding and examples (although not normally complete) are often excavated at Neolithic settlement sites.

Further reading:

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