

An organised society

6,000 to 2,000 years ago

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An organised society

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1 - Burial urn

3,200-3,600 years old

From near Berrynarbour

This large urn was found covering cremated bones in a barrow. It is typical of pottery called Trevisker ware.

2 - Bronze dagger

3,500-3,700 years old

From near Torrington

From a cremation burial in a barrow at Huntshaw. When it was excavated in 1867, this dagger was found with oak and beech leaves, possibly a covering for the burial. Daggers were high status weapons, often with ornate hilts made from wood, horn or even expensive materials like amber and gold.

3 - Bronze axe

3,000-3,700 years old

From near Colyton

In 1763 a barrow at Lovehayne Farm was dug into. Witnesses described how hundreds of axes “enough to fill half a wheelbarrow” were found. Initially identified as Roman chisels, most were sold for scrap. This axe was traced by local antiquaries Peter Orland Hutchinson and Mr Heineken.

4 - Lead copy of a bronze axe

Copy of a 3,000-3,700 year-old axe found near Colyton “22nd November 1861...cast several in lead, which I painted green to resemble bronze.” So wrote Peter Orlando Hutchinson in his journal.

5 - Necklace

3,500-3,700 years old

From near North Molton

The beads were found in 1889 when a plough horse called Darling put its foot through the top of a stone-lined chamber. Although the beads were probably local, they are made from exotic materials. The dark beads are lignite, a stone that can be highly polished, while the white and blue beads are faience, which is made of crushed quartz, copper and tin.

Farway barrows

One of the most significant barrow complexes in the South West is located around Honiton. Recent radiocarbon dates suggest they were in use between 3,660 and 4,210 years ago.

6 - Four pieces of bronze ingot

2,700-3,600 years old

From Gittisham Barrow 3, Farway

7 - Bronze axehead

3,000-3,700 years old

From Farway Hill

8 - Bronze socketed axehead

2,700-3,000 years old

From Farway Barrow 31

From the same barrow as bead (17) but from a much later burial.

9 - Bronze dagger

3,600-3,800 years old

From Farway Barrow 32

Found with the shale cup (10).

10 - Shale cup

3,600-3,750 years old

From Farway Barrow 32

Found in 1870 with a cremation, tree bark, a cairn of stones and the bronze dagger. The bark may have been the remains of a coffin.

11 - Shale cup

3,600-3,750 years old

From Farway Barrow 24

Found in 1868 with a cremation and funeral pyre. The two shale cups from Farway are similar to a handful of others in Europe. These elegantly shaped, precious cups are made of exotic materials such as gold, amber and shale.

12 - Shale cup

Modern replica

Made by Dennis Sloper in 1989 using only simple bronze and flint tools. He suggested the cup would have taken over 120 hours to make.

13-15 - Fossil sea urchins

Placed in a barrow 3,700-4,200 years ago

From Barrow 9, Farway

Fossils have fascinated people for centuries and are often kept as lucky charms. Perhaps the people who made the Farway barrows had similar beliefs.

16 - Haematite

3,600-4,200 years old

From Gittisham Barrow 2, Farway

Iron oxide, used to make red pigment. P. O. Hutchinson recorded in his journal: "so large a slice of the afternoon was consumed in the splendid collation [picnic]...that there was no time left to complete the examination of the barrow".

17 - Bone bead

3,800-4,000 years old

From Farway Barrow 31

The shape copies those made from an exotic ceramic called faience.

18 - Accessory vessel

3,700-3,900 years old

From Farway Barrow 21

Contains cremated human remains which have recently been radiocarbon dated to 1940-1750 cal BC. It is decorated with fine lines filled in with the red pigment haematite. Now named accessory vessels, these little pots often accompany cremation urns. No such urn was found in this barrow.

19 - Beaker

3,700-4,200 years old

From Sidmouth Barrow 9, Farway

Made of clay extracted on the edge of Dartmoor. It is poorly made and it is surprising that it was added to a burial so far away.

20 - Cremation urn

3,750-4,200 years old

From Farway Barrow 28

Found in the centre of the barrow on top of a pile of cremated human bones. Two other pots were found in other parts of the barrow, suggesting that other burials were inserted into the barrow at later dates.

21 - Burial chamber

3,300-3,500 years old

From Upton Pyne Barrow 248b

This barrow had a series of cremation burials and a stone-lined burial chamber near the centre. This urn had been placed upended in the chamber.

22 - Cremation urn

3,300-3,500 years old

From Upton Pyne Barrow 248b

Placed next to the chamber was an urn with a human cremation.

23 - Cremation urn

3,300-3,500 years old

From Upton Pyne Barrow 248b

This urn contained just charcoal.

24 - Cremation urn

3,300-3,500 years old

From Upton Pyne Barrow 248b

This urn was the first burial in the barrow. It contained the cremated remains of a child and oak charcoal.

25 - Accessory vessel

3,600-4,400 years old

From a barrow at Upton Pyne

In August 1870 the central barrow in the Upton Pyne group was excavated by Revd Kirwan. "We commenced by driving a trench 4 ft wide into it" he declared. This little pot was one of his finds.

26 - Bronze dagger

3,600-4,400 years old

From a barrow at Upton Pyne

Another find from the 1870 excavations was this dagger blade. Originally it was probably riveted to a wooden handle. Daggers are often associated with burials containing beaker pots.

27 - Bead necklace

3,600-4,400 years old

From a barrow at Upton Pyne

Found with the accessory vessel (25) and dagger (26). Most of the beads are made of shale, but there is also one of red clay and others formed from fossil marine animals, called crinoids.

28 - Hoard of gold bracelets

2,650-3,000 years old

From near Colaton Raleigh

These bracelets were found carefully placed one inside the other – deliberately buried rather than lost. The signs of heavy wear suggest they were treasured items or heirlooms, while the fragment may have been cut from another object as a token offering.

29 - Worth hoard

2,700-2,800 years old

From near Washfield

Two bronze spearheads, a bronze sword and a plate of bronze were found by a ford of the river Exe at Worth.

30 - Bloody Pool hoard

2,800-2,900 years old

From near South Brent

A hoard of three bronze spearheads and two spear ferrules. Hoards are often found in watery places. Maybe a marshy pool acted as a mirror to the sky or a passage to the depths – a suitable place to commune with ancestors or spirits.

31 - Hoard of scrap bronze

3,200-3,400 years old

From near Pinhoe

Found by metal-detectorists in 1999 and loaned by Mr J. Cobley. We do not know whether this hoard was buried as an offering or as a cache of scrap metal.

32-34 - Three pot sherds

2,700-3,000 years old

From Dean Moor

During the construction of the Avon Dam Reservoir on Dartmoor, a small prehistoric settlement was discovered. Pottery and other domestic items were found with the remains of an enclosure and houses. These everyday items are very different to the burial finds and hoards from the same period.

35 - Whetstone

2,700-3,000 years old

From Dean Moor

The groove in this stone has been worn through the action of sharpening pins.

36 - Haematite

2,700-3,000 years old

From Dean Moor

Haematite is a form of iron ore often used to make red pigment.

37 - Gaming counter

2,700-3,000 years old

From Dean Moor

Possibly used for a board game similar to 'nine men's morris'.

38 - Spindle whorl

2,700-3,000 years old

From Dean Moor

This stone disc for spinning yarn provides evidence of weaving.

39 - Two beads

2,700-3,000 years old

From Dean Moor

Both made from carnelian, a semi-precious gemstone.

40 - Cassiterite

2,700-3,000 years old

From Dean Moor

A piece of tin ore probably extracted from a Dartmoor stream. Tin was needed in bronze production.

41 - Slag from tin smelting

2,700-3,000 years old

From Dean Moor

To extract tin from ore it has to be heated in a furnace – a process called smelting which has a waste product known as slag. Finding both tin slag and tin ore at Dean Moor suggests that tin production was an important activity at the site.

42- Hoard of iron bars

2,000-2,200 years old

From Coffinswell

This mass of corroded iron was found by a farmer and metal-detectorists. Detailed analysis revealed 80 iron bars tied together in bundles placed into a bracken-lined pit. Julius Caesar mentioned that British tribes used iron bars as a form of currency. Hence these objects are often called 'currency bars'. They are not money as we know it, but a way of demonstrating quality of iron and a unit of ritual exchange.

43 - Pot sherds

2,000-2,300 years old

From near Honiton

Excavated as part of the A30 road widening scheme.

44 - Jar

2,000-2,300 years old

From near Honiton

An example of the decorated pottery made in the South West.

45 - Jar

2,000-2,200 years old

From Blackbury Castle

A locally made food storage jar or cooking pot.

46 - Bowl

Around 2,000 years old

From Hembury hillfort

The shape and decoration of this bowl seems to be inspired by metal bowls. To achieve the surface sheen, the pot is burnished with a bone or stick.

47 - Wooden figure

Radiocarbon dated to 426-352 cal BC, about 2,400 years old
From Kingsteignton

One of only a handful of such figures found in Britain, it was uncovered in 1867 by workmen at the ball clay quarries at Zitherixon near Kingsteignton. The figure originally would have had arms and possibly some form of dress.

On loan from Sibelco UK Ltd.

48 - Sling stones

2,000-2,400 years old
From Hembury hillfort

Many caches of river pebbles have been found at Devon hillforts, probably used as sling stones.

49 - Linchpin replica

Original pin 2,100-2,300 years old
From Loddiswell
Linchpins pass through a chariot's axle to keep the wheels on.

50 - Linchpin

2,100-2,300 years old
From Loddiswell

A decorative cap from a linchpin.

51 - Terret ring

2,100-2,300 years old

Found by Mr Osbourne on land owned by Mr Carr near Shillingford Abbot

A decorative rein ring from a chariot. It was fixed to the wooden yoke that spanned a pair of horses and controlled the reins.

52 - Harness fitting

2,000-2,300 years old

From near Shute

A decorative fitting that linked two harness straps.

On loan from Mr Andy Down.

53 - Decorative stud

1,950-2,100 years old

From near Pinhoe

Probably from a horse harness or chariot, originally with red enamel.

54 - Brooch

1,950-2,100 years old

From near Widworthy

This brooch, originally set with coral or a gemstone, was found by Mr Hill with a metal-detector.

55 - Mirror

Replica of a 1,950 year-old mirror

Found at Holcombe, near Uplyme

Decorative bronze mirrors allowed British metalworkers the chance to exhibit their great skills. The front would have been highly polished. The back was engraved with an intricate, swirling design. This mirror was discovered in a pit under the floor of a later Roman villa.

56-57 - Two glass beads

1,950-2,200 years old

From Hembury hillfort

This type of bead could have belonged to the last prehistoric occupiers of Hembury hillfort or to the Roman invaders.

58 - Glass bead

2,100-2,300 years old

From Hittersleigh

Found in a pit in a prehistoric house. Its similarity to European beads suggests it was imported.

59 - Coin

2,050-2,100 years old

From Northernhay, Exeter

Made from silver alloy in Brittany or the Channel Islands, it has a charioteer on one face.

60 - Coin

2,050-2,100 years old

From near Littlehempston

This coin was made in Brittany by a tribe called the Coriosolites.

61 - Coin

2,000-2,200 years old

Found at the North Gate, Exeter

A coin made by the Durotriges tribe in Dorset. The design of British coins had its origins in earlier Greek ones. Over distance and time the design gradually changed from the head of a Greek king or a bull, to something that appealed to the eyes of the British coin maker.

62 - Coin hoard

Minted around 2,000 years ago

From near Axminster

The tribes in Devon and Cornwall do not seem to have made their own coinage. These coins were minted by the Durotriges tribe in Dorset. The hoard was found in 1868 at Cotley Farm.

63-65 - Three spindle whorls

2,000-2,700 years old

From Sidmouth

Used in the production of woollen yarn.

66 - Spindle whorl

2,000-2,700 years old

From Haldon Hill

67 - Spindle whorl

2,000-2,700 years old

From near North Tawton

Attached to a modern drop spindle. When the spindle is dropped and spun the spindle whorl acts as a weight to draw out the woollen yarn.

68-69 - Loom weights

2,700-3,200 years old

From near Honiton

These clay weights, decorated with a series of fingernail impressions running around the edge, may have been used to hold taut the threads on a loom. They were excavated from the post-holes of a round-house during the A30 road widening scheme.

Weaving woollen cloth must have been an important household activity, so it is possible they were placed as an offering when the house was being built.

70 - Quern stone

2,000-2,700 years old

From near Chagford

The upper stone from a two-part quern. Grain is poured into the quern and then the upper stone is rotated to grind it into flour.