

Making their mark

12,000 to 6,000 years ago

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1 - Microlith

6,000-10,000 years old

From Westward Ho!

This tiny, carefully shaped, flint was used as the barb for an arrow. All of the arrow's components were skilfully made so they worked at maximum efficiency when it mattered.

2 - Replica arrow

Modern replica of an arrow used

6,000-12,000 years ago

This hunting weapon is made of flint, wood and feather, stuck together with wood ash or animal glue. It was a long task to make such weapons, but their effectiveness made it time well spent. It is likely that hunters stockpiled all the equipment they needed for a successful hunt.

3-8 - Adzes and axes

6,000-12,000 years old

From near Stockland

These tools were ideal for cutting and shaping wood. They are made from a flint-like stone, called chert. After roughly shaping into an adzehead, they were given a sharp, working edge by striking off flakes. The finished tools were then attached to wooden handles.

9 - Stone macehead

8,000-10,000 years old

From near Cullompton

A hole was drilled in this river pebble so that a wooden shaft could be attached. It could be a macehead, hammer or possibly the weight for a digging stick used to unearth edible roots or to dig animals out of burrows.

Westward Ho!

Melting ice sheets at the end of the ice ages led to rising sea levels that covered areas of coastline. At Westward Ho! In North Devon a drowned forest and peat are preserved below the low tide level. With the peat are animal bones and flint tools dating to the period after the ice ages. David Trapnell's lifelong interest in Westward Ho! beach led him, and his daughter Marion, to collect artefacts from this site. Finds from the Trapnell Collection feature in this display.

10 - Flint core and blades

6,000-10,000 years old
From Westward Ho!

The early hunters at Westward Ho! made most of their weapons and tools from tiny flint blades.

11 - Three microliths

6,000-10,000 years old
From Westward Ho!

Microliths, literally meaning small stones, are tiny blades of flint and chert. They could be set into handles or shafts to make composite tools, like arrows, harpoons, knives and saws.

12 - Backed blade

6,000-10,000 years old

From Westward Ho!

A flint blade probably used as a small knife. One edge has been left sharp, while the other has been finely chipped to blunt or 'back' it. This process of shaping a flint tool is called retouch.

13 - Awl

6,000-10,000 years old

Trapnell Collection, Westward Ho!

This tool was probably used to puncture holes in hides, so they could be sewn together for clothes or to form shelters.

14 - Flint flakes and blades

6,000-10,000 years old

From Westward Ho!

The hundreds of waste flakes found on the beach show that people were making tools on site.

15-16 - Two cores

6,000-10,000 years old

From Westward Ho!

The scars indicate where blades have been struck off the core.

17 - Hazelnut shells

6,000-10,000 years old

From Westward Ho!

Plant remains have been preserved for thousands of years in the peat at Westward Ho! The types of plants found indicate fenland conditions. The quantity of hazelnuts found suggests they were an important food source.

Cattle bones

2,500-4,500 years old

From Westward Ho!

These bones come from domesticated cattle rather than the large, wild cattle known as aurochs. These bones must be from a later phase of the site, probably Iron Age or Roman.

18 - Cattle jaw

22 - Cattle rib

26 - Cattle leg bone (humerus)

Red deer antler and bones

6,000-10,000 years old

From Westward Ho!

Red deer were plentiful in Devon after the ice ages. They would have been one of the most important targets for hunters: their meat providing food, their hides clothing and their antlers essential material for making tools.

19-21, 24, 28-30 - Red deer antlers

31-32 - Red deer leg bone (tibia)

34 - Red deer leg bone (calcaneus)

37-38 - Red deer leg bone (humerus)

39-40 - Red deer pelvises

Aurochs bones

6,000-10,000 years old

Found at Westward Ho!

Aurochs were huge wild oxen. Standing two metres (6 feet) high with large horns, they would make fearsome targets for a hunter.

23 - Auroch rib

25 - Auroch leg bone (humerus)

27 - Auroch shoulder blade (scapula)

35-36 - Auroch leg bones (metapodials)

33 - Wolf leg bone (ulna)

6,000-10,000 years old

Trapnell Collection, Westward Ho!

Wolves adapted well to life after the ice ages. They would have been quite common in Devon, competing with human hunters for their prey. Hunting dogs were probably bred from the cubs of captured wolves.

41 - Human leg bone (femur)

2,500-2,800 years old

Trapnell Collection, Westward Ho!

It is unusual to find ancient human bones on beaches. This one was probably washed from a burial which is now underwater. It was radiocarbon dated to much later than the ice ages.

42 - Bone awl

6,000-10,000 years old

Trapnell Collection, Westward Ho!

This piece of bone has been sharpened to make it into an awl, used to make holes in animal hides so that they could be stitched together into clothing.

43 - Decorated pot sherd

4,500-5,400 years old

From Westward Ho!

A sherd from the rim of a bowl decorated with fingernail impressions in a herringbone pattern. Tiny fragments of rock mixed in with the clay provide evidence that they were made from clay extracted near Dartmoor.

On loan from Emily Trapnell.

44 - Two beaker pot sherds

4,000-4,200 years old

Trapnell Collection, Westward Ho!

These two sherds came from a pot called a beaker, which is particularly associated with the early Bronze Age and so is far later in date than much of the flint and bone at Westward Ho!

45 - Grooved ware pot

4,500-5,300 years old

Found on Haldon Hill

This pottery type, found across south-west England, is named after its grooved decoration.

46 - Bowl

4,700-5,000 years old

From near Membury

This may have held ceremonial offerings. The holes seem to be the remains of an ancient repair.

47 - Bowl sherds

4,500-5,400 years old

From near Ottery St Mary

The decoration was created by pressing cord into the wet clay.

48-49 - Piercers

4,200-6,000 years old

Found at Salcombe Hill and Haldon Hill

Used for piercing hide or boring through wood and bone.

50 - Notch

4,500-5,000 years old

From North Devon

A scraping tool for straightening wooden arrow shafts.

51 - Scraper

4,500-5,500 years old

From Baggy Point, North Devon

A chisel-shaped blade used to scrape hides or shape wood.

52 - Polished flint axehead

4,200-6,000 years old

From near Bridford

Devon's first farmers used flint axes to clear woodland. This one has been re-sharpened often.

53 - Flint knife with ground edge

4,000-5,000 years old

From near Sprague

Ground edges were less sharp than chipped edges, but gave a smoother cut. They took many hours to produce, making this a treasured possession. Similar precious tools are found as grave goods in burials.

54 - Punch or fire-lighter

4,500-5,000 years old

From North Devon

This may have been used to punch off small chips of flint or to create sparks for lighting fires.

55 - Chert core and flakes

4,500-5,500 years old

From near Honiton

Chert is a flint-like stone that can be worked in a similar fashion. It is rare to find such a group of flakes that fit back together like this. They were found during the A30 road-widening scheme.

56 - Saddle quern and grinding stone

4,500-5,000 years old

Quern from Hazard Hill, Totnes

Grinding Stone from Hembury

The action of pushing and pulling the grinding stone backwards and forwards over the quern slowly grinds grain into flour. Eventually the quern is ground into a saddle shape, hence its name.

57 - Replica sickle

A type used around

4,600-5,000 years ago

Modern handle, flint blade from Denmark

This tool is a replica of those used to harvest cereal crops. Its one-piece blade is typical of later flint sickles. Earlier examples used a line of flints to form a blade.

Early enclosure at Hembury

The site of Hembury sits on a spur of hills above Honiton. Beneath the impressive hillfort earthworks that we can see today, lies another enclosure thousands of years older. This was an important site for early farming peoples, possibly a meeting place, a trading point or a refuge in times of danger.

58 - Spelt grains

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

Spelt is an ancient form of wheat grown by the first farmers in Devon. Spelt grains were found in storage pits at Hembury. They survived for thousands of years as burning had transformed the grains into carbon.

59 - Hazelnuts

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

These hazelnuts have been preserved because they were burnt and turned to carbon. Such remains show the people at Hembury relied on gathering wild foods as well as farming.

60 - Pot sherd with charred food remains

5,480-5,620 years old

From Hembury

Even the smallest sherd can yield vital clues. The charred food has been radiocarbon dated, while the pottery has undergone archaeomagnetic dating, which is based on changes in the strength of the Earth's magnetic field.

61 - Charcoal

5,640-5,705 years old

From Hembury

Radiocarbon dating of this hazel charcoal suggests there is a 95% probability that it dates between 3705-3640 cal BC. This led archaeologists to infer that the early enclosure at Hembury dates to 3715-3650 cal BC.

62 - Sickle

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

Set into a wooden shaft, this carefully worked flint blade was used to harvest cereal crops

63 - Quern

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

Once harvested, cereal grains were ground into flour with a quern. Wheat grains were placed on the bowl-shaped stone and then ground by the back and forth motion of a second stone.

64 - Pot

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

A good example of the type of pot used at Hembury, it's made of clay from Cornwall and is likely to have been a valuable possession. This is one of many objects or raw materials that had travelled a great distance to get to Hembury.

65 - Bowl

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

Made from locally sourced clay.

66 - Pot sherd

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

Made from locally sourced clay.

67-70 - Pot handles and lugs

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

A selection of pot sherds showing the variety of handle and lug shapes. The pierced fragments may have held rope handles.

71-73 - Pots made of Cornish clay

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

About 10% of the Hembury pottery is made from clay from the Lizard Peninsula. It is identified by the presence of minerals, such as feldspars. But why import clay? Maybe it made better pots, or indicates links with Cornwall.

74 - Waste from flint working

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

75 - Flint core and blades

Made 5,400-5,750 years ago

From Hembury

76 - Flint core and bladelets

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

The delicacy of these pieces suggests they were struck using an antler punch not stone.

77 - Flint tools

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

These flint tools were ideal for working wood, bone and hides.

78 - Flint scraper

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

A tool suitable for working wood, bone and hides. Many scrapers have been found at Hembury.

79 - Flint knife

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

This carefully shaped tool has two sharp edges and a small scraper blade on one end.

80 - Flint awl

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

By striking off small flint chips, this flake was transformed into an awl.

81 - Three beads

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

These beads are made from Kimmeridge shale. Found on the south Dorset coast, this soft rock is easily shaped into ornaments.

82-85 - Four axehead fragments

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

These fragments of polished flint axes may have had great personal value to their owners.

86 - Leaf-shaped arrowheads

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

Was Hembury attacked? These arrowheads were all found around the main gate to the enclosure, which had been burnt. These events may represent the earliest evidence for warfare in Devon.

87-89 - Leaf-shaped arrowheads

5,000-6,000 years old

Found on Haldon Hill

90-91 - Oblique arrowheads

4,000-6,000 years old

Baggy Point and Wear Gifford

92-93 - Transverse arrowheads

4,000-5,400 years old

Found on the North Devon coast

The wide, chisel-shaped edge cut tendons and caused heavy bleeding, making it difficult for prey to escape from hunters.

94-96 - Barbed and tanged arrowheads

3,500-4,500 years old

From Stockland, Fernworthy and Cullever Steps

These typical Bronze Age arrowheads have a central tang which attaches to the arrow shaft, and barbs which fix into its target.

97 - Leaf-shaped arrowhead with replica shaft

5,000-6,000 years old

From Baggy Point, North Devon

98 - Transverse arrowhead with replica shaft

4,000-5,400 years old

From Baggy Point, North Devon

99 - Bowl

5,400-5,750 years old

From Hembury

This beautiful bowl has been reconstructed to show the skill of the early potters.

100-107 - Cornish greenstone axeheads

4,200-6,000 years old

All these axes have been sampled for petrological analysis. This tells us where the stone they are made of comes from – in this case Cornwall. It may have been quarried or collected as beach pebbles. Stone axes were vital tools for the first farmers. But they must have had a value beyond the purely practical to make it worthwhile to transport them such distances.

100 From Peters Marland

101 From Hazard Hill

102 From Shebbear

103 From Broadclyst

104 From Whiddon Down

105 From Silverton

106 From North Tawton

107 From Otterton

108-109 - Making a polished axehead

4,200-6,000 years old

Polishing stone from Haldon Hill

It would have taken hundreds of hours to make a polished stone axehead. The first stage, to roughly shape the stone, is relatively quick. After this the axehead is ground using coarse rock and sand. Finally, it is polished with a fine abrasive stone, such as the one displayed here.

110 - Triangular polished axehead

5,200-5,700 years old

Found at Raddon Hill during work by South West Water

This unusually shaped axe may have been a local copy of a jadeite axe. It was found in the ditch of a causewayed enclosure. These sites have an enclosure made of a series of ditches with gaps, or causeways, in between. The placing of such a special axe in a ditch may have been to give the site power or to commemorate a special event.

111 - Fragment of jadeite axe

Made around 6,000 years ago, buried around 5,000 years ago

Found at High Peak, Sidmouth

Although this axehead is made of stone from the Alps, it was made in Brittany and brought to Devon hundreds of years later. It must have been a very special, even magical, object.

112-115 - Stone axe-hammers

3,700-4,300 years old

These axes have a hole drilled through them to take a handle. The smaller ones may have been weapons, the larger ones probably heavyweight tools.

112 From Challacombe

113 From Bratton Down

114 From Woodbury Common

115 From Woodbury Common

116 - Stone hammer

3,700-4,300 years old

From near Langtree

This tool was never finished. Someone tried to drill a hole from both sides but abandoned the hammer before it was completed.

117-122 - Polished flint axeheads

4,200-6,000 years old

These axeheads were made from local flint, which gives a sharp edge but is extremely difficult to shape by polishing. Each axehead would have taken hundreds of hours to fashion, making them valuable items.

117 From Aylesbeare

118 From Drewsteignton

119 From Alphington

120 From Hartland

121 From Shadrack

122 From Chudleigh

123- Polished flint axehead in modern haft

4,200-6,000 years old

A replica demonstrating the typical fixing of the axehead into a wooden handle or haft.

124 - Hoard of scrap bronze

2,800-3,000 years old

From Talaton

Found by Mr N. Brown, Mr J. Hewitt and Mr A. Rizzuti on land owned by Mr P. Skinner

Were all of these ingot pieces and broken tools buried as an offering to the gods? Or just to keep them safe, as scrap bronze was recycled to fashion new objects.

125 - Bronze spearhead

3,400-3,700 years old

From near Uplyme

Probably used as a throwing spear or javelin. The spearhead was lashed to the shaft through the loops on either side of the socket.

126 - Spearhead

3,400-3,700 years old

From near Upottery

Found by Mr Keith Scott on land owned by Mr David Bright

The spearhead seems to have been broken in the past and the two pieces buried together. This may have been done to ritually 'kill' the object and reduce its power.

127 - Spearhead

3,250-3,400 years old

From near Culmstock

Used as either a thrusting or throwing weapon.

128 - Flint dagger

3,500-4,300 years old

From near Honiton

The shape of this flint dagger has echoes of early copper daggers. It would have taken considerable skill to make such a tool out of flint: about 12 hours work and the removal of at least 3,000 chips of flint.

129 - Dirk

3,500-3,600 years old

Found on Pole Sands, Exmouth

A short stabbing sword, the blade was riveted to its handle. Several bronze tools and weapons have been found on the South Devon coast recently, either washed ashore from wrecks or eroded from the land.

130 - Bronze dagger

3,200-3,300 years old

From near Torrington

This type of hook-tanged dagger is almost certainly of European origin and may have been made in Cyprus. Similar pieces have been found on the South Devon coast and may show trade between the Mediterranean and the South West.

131 - Bronze double axehead

Modern cast of a 3,500-4,500 year old axe

Found at Mount Howe, Topsham

This axehead is unlike any other found in Devon. It is double headed with a central hole for the handle. It almost certainly came from the Mediterranean, probably Cyprus.

132 - Bronze axehead

3,200-3,600 years old

From Horridge Common, Dartmoor

This axe has a very similar shape to those found in eastern Europe and the Czech Republic. It seems that people would transport or trade such bronze tools over great distances.

133 - Socketed axe with modern handle

2,700-3,000 years old

Found in Devon

The handle fits into the socket of the axe and then the two are lashed together. It is important to get the right weight and shape of axe to allow it to be swung with maximum efficiency.

134 - Flint axe

3,700-4,000 years old

From near Bridford

This beautifully shaped flint axe mimics the shape of the early metal axes.

On loan from Mr S. Brent

135-137 - Bronze flat axeheads

3,700-4,000 years old

The earliest form of bronze axe used in Devon. They are made in simple one or two part moulds.

135 From Tiverton

136 From near Colleton

137 From Drewsteignton

138 - Bronze axehead

3,400-3,600 years old
From near Teignmouth

The sides of this little axehead have been raised into flanges. This makes it stronger and helps it to be wedged into the socket of the handle. It would have been an effective weapon or woodworking tool.

139-143 - Bronze palstaves

3,000-3,700 years old

The technology of these axes developed from earlier flat axes.

139 From near Christow

140 From Drewsteignton

141 From Week, North Bovey

142 From Binworthy

143 From Chagford

144-148 - Bronze looped palstaves

3,000-3,500 years old

The loop is used to help lash the axehead securely to the handle.

144 From near Bovey Tracey

145 From Week, North Bovey

146 From near Exeter

147 From near Bridford

148 From at Powderham

149-150 - Socketed axeheads

2,700-3,000 years old

These axeheads represent the final innovation in bronze axe design. They are made in a multi-part mould so that a hollow socket is formed. The handle of the axe is fixed into the socket, making splitting less likely. Hollow tools require far less bronze than the solid palstaves and flat axes.

149 From Westleigh

150 From near Colyton

151 - Native copper

From Cornwall

Copper is one of the few metals that occur naturally in a pure state, known as native copper. Prehistoric metalworkers were able to process native copper far more easily than ores found in rocks.

152 - Chalcocite

From Cornwall

One of the copper ores found in the South West. On its own, copper is too soft for making tools, but when mixed with tin it makes a far harder alloy we call bronze.

153 - Cassiterite

From Meldon Quarry

Tin was an extremely valuable metal in prehistory. When mixed with copper it forms the alloy bronze. Cassiterite was the most important source of tin ore for prehistoric metalworkers.

154 - Galena

From Meldon Quarry

Galena is a lead ore. Some bronzes have a small amount of lead mixed with the copper and tin. It helped in the casting process but too much made the tool weaker.

155 - Crucible

2,900-3,000 years old

From Dainton

Thick pottery vessels, such as this, were used to melt bronze. The molten bronze was poured into moulds to cast tools and weapons.

156 - Copper ingot

2,700-4,600 years old

From near Morchard Bishop

Such a large ingot of almost pure copper would have been extremely valuable.

157 - Two tin ingots

Possibly 1,300-4,600 years old

From a wreck in Bigbury Bay

Divers from the South West Maritime Archaeology Group found 42 ingots of almost pure tin. Such a large quantity would have made a valuable cargo. We do not know the destination of the ship, maybe along the British coast or across to France. As tin was traded in this way for centuries, it is not possible to date these ingots with certainty yet.

158 - H-shaped tin ingot

Possibly 1,300-4,600 years old

From a wreck in Bigbury Bay

Two ingots in this unusual shape were found in Bigbury Bay. Ancient Greek writers described a type of ingot called an astragalos, or knucklebone, as coming from Cornwall. This may be an example of one of these.

159 - Mould fragments

2,900-3,000 years old

From Dainton

From moulds used to cast bronze swords and spear ferrules. These are just a few fragments from the many found at Dainton. It is rare to find moulds from this period, so this site is important in the study of early metalwork.

160 - Mould for casting bronze rapiers

3,275-3,400 years old

From near Chudleigh Knighton

Plaster cast of an original two-part stone mould. The thin diagonal lines are to allow hot gases to escape during casting. The casts were taken shortly after the moulds were found in 1851. Sadly, the originals are now lost.

161 - Mould for casting a bronze rapier

3,275-3,400 years old

From near Chudleigh Knighton

As well as casting a rapier, this mould also makes a thin ridged strip. Is it to decorate the rapier handle, to test the bronze or for another use altogether? The mould is displayed with a rapier from the Talaton hoard.

162 - Hoard of bronze rapiers

3,275-3,400 years old

From near Talaton

The three rapiers come from a hoard of six found in 1867. These stabbing swords had handles fixed by small bronze rivets.