

Devon Bronze Age Hoards

A hoard is a store of valuable objects which is usually hidden away or buried. If you went home and got all your favourite toys and objects and hid them away, that would be your personal hoard. We have found hoards from the Bronze Age, all over Devon; maybe close to where you are now!

Bronze Age hoards can include weapons, such as axes and swords, jewellery including bracelets, rings, necklaces and even random pieces of metal, as metal was considered so important.

Let's have a look at some:

The Burlescombe Hoard

(Burlescombe is a small village north of Tiverton)

This hoard has 3 objects: a complete axe head, part of a bracelet and a piece of waste metal that is sometimes left over from casting objects such as the axe head.



The Dawlish Hoard

(Dawlish is on the South Devon coast)

The Dawlish hoard consists of four gold bracelets, a fragment of bronze sword, two fragments of bronze axe and eleven fragments of bronze ingots. The four bracelets had all been deliberately folded before being buried around 3,000 years ago, at the very end of the Bronze Age.

The hoard was found by two metal detectorists



The Pinhoe Hoard

(Pinhoe is close to Exeter)

This is a hoard of broken bronze axes and bracelets found by a group of metal-detectorists in 1999. The hoard had been buried in a small pit which had been disturbed by modern ploughing.



The Colaton Raleigh Hoard

(Colaton Raleigh is not far from Budleigh Salterton in East Devon)

Three gold bracelets and a small gold fragment were found in 1986. As the bracelets were found one inside the other we know that they were deliberately buried as a hoard rather than lost. The bracelets show signs of heavy wear so perhaps they were very treasured items.



Awliscombe Hoard

(Awliscombe is not far from Honiton)

A hoard of three fragments from a Bronze Age sword from around 3000 years ago. The sword was deliberately broken and these fragments buried. We don't know why.



Questions

- ▶ Why do you think these objects were buried?
- ▶ How important do you think they were to whoever buried them?
- ▶ Why do you think they were deliberately bent or broken?

The truth is, we don't know the answers to these questions and your ideas may well be correct. We do have some ideas and theories:

Bronze is a very heavy metal. Smiths who used to make these bronze items would have a hard time transporting large amounts at a time. So, it is thought that bronze ingots and weapons (such as this axe head) were buried for safekeeping. The smiths would just have to hope they didn't forget where they were buried, or someone didn't steal them!



Bronze was a very expensive metal and only the richest people had access to it. It is thought that smaller hoards were buried by people or families because the objects were too valuable to have in their homes. This sword was deliberately broken. Although we do not know why, it might have been part of a ceremony after the owner passed away. Perhaps he was a very powerful person whose sword had been very important to him.

With bronze and gold being so valuable, it is believed people may have buried the objects as an offering to the gods. They might have done this as a ritual or as a one-off occasion.

What might they have been asking of the gods in return for their precious objects?





They might have been asking for a better climate, more luck for farming, the health of a friend or family member. They might have been trying to communicate with their dead ancestors too! Hoards buried in watery areas like lakes or rivers are considered to be ritual sacrifices. Water might have been seen as a mirror into the skies or even a passage to the

depths. This perhaps made it easier to communicate with the gods.

There are many reasons as to why these bronze objects were hidden or buried away. Some things we find might simply have been lost. For example spearheads might have been used in battle and were lost in the fields.

Now enjoy your Bronze Age activity