4. Early Bronze Age (c. 2,400-1,500 BC)

4.1 Summary of the Collections

The Early Bronze Age funerary assemblages held by the Wiltshire Museum are of international importance and many of the most well-known and significant objects in the Museum collections are amongst them. The core of these collections is the Stourhead Collection, purchased by the Society in 1883 and consisting, largely, of the various artefacts excavated from Wessex barrows by William Cunnington I and Richard Colt-Hoare in the early 19th century. Fortunately, the pair kept detailed records for the time, and the majority of the approximately 500 objects can be attributed to particular barrows and burials, and often relatively detailed accounts of their depositional contexts can be reconstructed (e.g. Needham et al. 2010; Higham and Carey 2019). This collection contains many notable grave groups, including early graves such as Mere G6a and Milston G51, but with a clear majority attributed to the 'mature' Early Bronze Age, most famously of course being the 'Golden barrow' (Upton Lovell G2e) and the exceptional Bush Barrow (Wilsford G5, see cover image).

This initial collection of objects has been supplemented by further excavations and chance finds of Early Bronze Age sites and burials undertaken in the 19th and 20th centuries, but especially in the post-War period. These excavations include the Cunningtons' excavation of Roundway G8 (Cunnington 1856), the 'Manton Barrow' (Preshute G1a, Cunnington 1907), The Sanctuary, Avebury (Cunningham 1932), two separate internments at Nethavon Flying School (Grinsell 1957: 70), and Oliver's Camp (Cunnington 1907b), as well as numerous barrows excavated between 1950 and 1975, including Milton Lilbourne G1-5 (Ashbee 1986), Wilsford G36-39 (Grimes 1964), Wilsford G51-54 (Smith 1991), Avebury G55 (Smith 1965), Winterbourne Stoke G43 (Ozanne 1972), Avebury G6b (Smith 1966), Amesbury G39 (Ashbee 1981), Amesbury G51 (Ashbee 1978), Lamb Down (Vatcher 1963) and the numerous barrows examined as part of Nicholas Thomas' excavations on Snail Down, in Collingbourne Kingston and Collingbourne Ducis (Thomas 2005). The Museum also holds archives relating to the unpublished excavations of Bishop's Cannings G61 and G62 and West Overton G44. Whilst it must be said that the bulk of the grave goods in the collections originate in earlier excavations, the collection as a whole represents a large and extremely diverse assemblage of grave goods covering much of Wiltshire as well as the chalklands of Dorset.

Unfortunately, the Museum's collection of Early Bronze Age human remains is less extensive. Cunnington and Colt Hoare did not typically retain human remains, and the Museum holds only a single secondary cremation from the Stourhead collection, from Wimborne St. Giles G2, Dorset. Similarly, the human remains from a number of later excavations, such as those at Woodhenge by Maud Cunnington and Amesbury G39 by Paul Ashbee were deposited with other institutions such as the Duckworth Laboratory, Cambridge, separate to the rest of the archive. Although it is not intended to be a complete list, Table 1 shows the correspondence between human remains, funerary vessels, and other grave goods at a selection of sites, and illustrates the relative scarcity of grave assemblages in the collections that combine two or more of these categories. In summary, 281 MODES records of human remains are attributed to the Early Bronze Age

specifically, although this will perhaps include some secondary cremations which post-date 1500 BC. The usefulness of this number in terms of quantification is doubtful, as, for instance, the three Beaker-period flat burials excavated by Peter Fowler at Overton Down XI (Fowler 2000: 82-86) are recorded across 29 MODES records. Nonetheless, the Museum holds human remains from approximately 35 different archaeological sites or barrows, representing a significant collection of material. This includes unpublished material such as that from Bishops Cannings G61.

The Museum's collection of ceramics from the Early Bronze Age is also of note. The Stourhead collection contains twelve substantively complete beaker vessels, ranging from finely decorated examples such as that from Durrington G36 (Figure 4.1), through to more crudely executed vessels such as those from Wilsford G51 and G62. This total has been expanded greatly by subsequent excavations of prehistoric barrows and other sites, such as those listed above as well as Paul Ashbee's excavation of the Early Neolithic West Kennet Long Barrow, which was found to contain two finely decorated early Low-Carinated beakers. Excluding field walked and chance find assemblages such as those in the Owen Meyrick and Andrew Sewell Collections, the Museum MODES database holds 376 records relating to excavated beaker sherds or assemblages, attributed to 54 different sites. Whilst a number are funerary vessels, perhaps a majority are loose sherds found within the barrow mounds or pre-mound layers probably relating to domestic occupation. One important assemblage in this vein is an assemblage of c. 500 beaker sherds recovered in pre-barrow features relating to a probable settlement on Snail Down, Collingbourne Kingston and Collingbourne Ducis

Figure 4.1: The Durrington G36 beaker.

(Thomas 2005). Further domestic beaker assemblages were recovered by Chris Gingell during the Marlborough Downs project, excavated at Bishops Cannings Down and Dean Bottom (Gingell 1980; 1992). A group of sherds from the latter was recovered in the fill of a pit which is associated with a radiocarbon date of 2460-2140 cal BC, and is an important assemblage for dating Needham's (2005: 188) Tall Mid-Carinated group of beakers. However, Dean Bottom also illustrates that the number of sites identified in this report is likely an underestimate; this important assemblage was recorded with only a broad 'Bronze Age' classification, with no reference to either beakers or the Early Bronze Age.

In addition to beakers, the Museum also holds a large collection of 40 miniature funerary vessels, often interpreted as incense cups, again from both the Stourhead collection and more recent excavations, as well as 60 records relating to collared urns recovered through excavation, attributed to 35 sites. Whilst the latter number excludes a small number of chance finds, it seems likely to be an underestimate, as it is again dependent upon these vessels and fabrics being identifiable within the Collections Management System, although it may also be a reflection of the general lack of evidence for domestic settlement in Wessex during the post-Beaker period prior to the development of Deverell-Rimbury fabrics (Pollard and Healey in Webster 2007: 83). That there is apparent continuity of occupation at both Dean Bottom and Bishops Cannings Down between the beaker and Deverell-Rimbury phases implies that both

Figure 4.3 (above): Detail of preserved gold studs. Image: David Bukach/University of Birmingham.

Figure 4.2 (left): Gold-studded dagger pommel and dagger from Bush Barrow. Image: David Bukach/University of Birmingham.

assemblages may cover the period c. 1900-1600 BC (Gingell 1980; 1992).

Many of the more recent excavations listed above have also produced assemblages of worked flint (although in many cases the bulk of the assemblage may related to late Neolithic pre-barrow occupation), however, these assemblages have been less consistently discussed than their ceramic counterparts, for instance, an assemblage of c. 600-800 worked flints attributed to the excavation of Avebury G55 was not discussed by Smith and Simpson (1966). Unfortunately, unless worked or included as a grave good, animal remains do not appear to have been retained at the majority of these sites, and the only relevant assemblages, from the excavations at Wilsford Down (Grimes 1964) and Steele's unpublished excavation of Codford, are both relatively small.

4.2 Research summary

4.2.1 Summary

Unsurprisingly, the Museum's Early Bronze Age collections are amongst those who receive the most interest from researchers, as well as consistently attracting high-profile and well-funded research projects. It is also notable that there are a number of objects, particularly Early Bronze Age goldwork, which have been accessed repeatedly over the course of the last 10 years.

The recent publication of the Beaker People Project (Parker Pearson et al. 2019) and Olalde et al.'s (2018) study of genetic shifts in the Early Bronze Age demonstrates the exceptional value of the Museum's collection of human remains from this period, despite its small size relative to collections of grave goods. The Beaker People Project sampled ten individuals, including two from the Late Neolithic, for radiocarbon dating and Strontium, Oxygen, Carbon, Nitrogen and Sulphur isotopic analysis, as well as undertaking an osteological review of the remains. In addition to identifying non-local individuals, such skeleton 7 from Wilsford G54, the large corpus of new radiocarbon dates allowed for a reassessment of the dating of beakers in Britain, arguing that funerary depositions of the vessels had largely ceased by c. 1950 BC, significantly earlier than previously thought. Olalde et al.'s (2018), study sample seven individuals, including one from the Late Neolithic, for ancient DNA analysis. In addition to providing accurate indications of genetic sex (in some cases contrary to previous osteological assessments) these results were part of a much larger pan-European study which was able to identify a major genetic shift at the start of the Bronze Age. Perhaps more excitingly, the data from Olalde et al.'s study has allowed Booth et al. (2021) to reconstruct familial relationships at a local level, highlighting a number of closely related beaker-period individuals buried in the Amesbury area, as well as the two individuals excavated from the Netheravon Flying School.

In addition to these projects, there have also been a number of smaller scale research projects which have examined human remains. Jones et al. (2017) undertook a reassessment of the primary log-coffin burial in Milton Lilbourne G4, including sampling the individual for radiocarbon dating, whilst the probable trumpet of worked human bone from Wilsford G58 has been radiocarbon dated by Booth and Brück (2020), as part of a wider project which has provided further evidence for the curation and manipulation of human remains in the Early Bronze Age. English Heritage (Vincent and May 2010) have undertaken a thorough assessment of the age, sex and condition of all of the human

remains from the Stonehenge landscape held in museum collections, although it is unfortunately difficult to link their findings back to the primary museum collections.

Other research projects accessing the Early Bronze Age collections have invariably focused on grave goods. Principally among these has been the Leverhulme-funded project re-examining Early Bronze Age Grave Goods from across Britain (Woodward and Hunter 2011; 2015). Between the two volumes 245 objects from the Wiltshire Museum Collections are discussed, principally examined macroscopically or under low magnification, providing an excellent synthesis of current thought, and updated interpretations of a huge variety of grave good categories. A number of objects discussed by Woodward and Hunter have received subsequent research or discussion: Wallis (2014) convincingly disputes the interpretation of wristguards as being a falconry tool, whilst the gold-studded bush barrow dagger hilts have been a particular focus of research in the past 10 years (Corfield 2012; Standish 2020; Papadimitiou *et al.* 2021; Figure 4.2-3). This has included analysis of trace lead-isotopes in order to identify a source of the gold, as well as experimental reproduction as part of renewed interest in potential links between Mycenaean Greece and North Western Europe in the Early Bronze Age. There has been continued interest in arguing for an interpretation of the sheet-gold lozenge of Bush Barrow and related artefacts as being in some way a calendar (Maumene 2017), whilst the Chalcolithic gold 'sun-discs' have recently been comprehensively reviewed as part of a larger European study (Gerloff 2016).

Objects not discussed by Woodward and Hunter have also been consulted during the review period. Frieman (2014) has examined the two Early Bronze Age flint daggers held in the collections as part of a national survey, whilst there has also been two very distinct takes on the Museum's collection of miniature funerary vessels. The first, by Jones and Brück (Jones 2012; Brück and Jones 2018) approaches the vessels from an extremely theoretical perspective, discussing how the materiality of the vessels may have been experienced and what this may have meant to those who experienced them. The second, taken by Copper (2017) in their Mphil thesis, is a much more traditional contextual and typological analysis of the vessels. Recently, there has also been a great deal of interest in evidence of metal working amongst grave assemblages, often incorporating use-wear analysis (Boutoille 2019; Tsoraki *et al.* 2020), and the Museum is currently awaiting the publication of one such large-scale project, Beyond the Three Age System (University of Leicester n.d.) as well as the long-awaited results of Shell's research into the 'Shaman' metal-worker's burial, first reported over 20 years ago (Shell 2000).

4.2.2 Research projects and publications

Andrews, P., Last, J., Osgood, R., and Stoodley, N. (2019) *A Prehistoric burial mound and Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Barrow Clump, Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire,* Salisbury: Wessex Archaeology.

Booth, T., Brück, J., Brace, S., and Barnes, I. (2021) Tales from the supplementary information: ancestry change in chalcolithic–Early Bronze Age Britain was gradual with varied kinship organization, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 31, 379-400.

Booth, T., and Brück, J. (2020) Death is not the end: radio-carbon and histo-taphonomic evidence for the curation and excarnation of

human remains in Bronze Age Britain, *Antiquity* 94, 1186-1203.

Boutoille, L. (2019) Cushion stones and company: British and Irish finds of stone metalworking implements from the Bell Beaker period to the Late Bronze Age in Brandherm, D. (Ed.) *Aspects of the Bronze Age in the Atlantic Archipelago and Beyond: Proceedings from the Belfast Bronze Age Forum, 9–10 November 2013*. (Archaeologia Atlantica – Monographiae; Vol. 3). Curach Bhán Publications

Brück, J., and Jones, A.M., (2018) Finding objects, making persons: fossils in British Early Bronze Age burials in Harrison-Buck, E., and Hendon, J. (eds.) *Relational identities and other-than-human agency in archaeology, U*niversity of Colorado Press, pp. 237-262.

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Frieman, C.J. (2014) Double Edged Blades: Re-visiting the British (and Irish) Flint Daggers *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 80, 33-65.

Gerloff, S. (2016) Die kupfer- und bronzezeitlichen „Sonnenscheiben" aus dem atlantischen Europa, *Die kunde: zeitschrift fur niedersachsische Archaologie* 67, 151-220.

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Jones, A., Brunning, R., and McKinley, I. (2017) Barrow (G4), Milton Lilbourne, Wiltshire: new analysis and dating of the log coffin burial, *WANHM* 110, 123-133.

Maumene, C. (2017) The Bush Barrow and Clandon Barrow Gold Lozenges and the Upton Lovell Golden Button: A Possible Calendrical Interpretation, *Culture and Cosmos 21,* 31-50.

Olalde, I., Booth, T., Reich, D., and others (2018) The Beaker phenomenon and the genomic transformation of northwest Europe, *Nature* 555, 190.

Papadimitiou, N., Konstantinidi-Syvridi, E., and Goumas, A. (2021) A demanding gold-working technique attested in Armorican/Wessex and Early Mycenaean funerary contexts, *Bulletin de l'association pour la promotion des reserches sur l'age du bronze* 19, 26-33.

Parker Pearson, M., Sheridan, A., Jay, M., Chamberlain, A., Richard, M.P., and Evans, J. (2019) *The Beaker people: isotopes, mobility and diet in Prehistoric Britain,* Oxford: Oxbow.

Standish, C. (2020) *Lead isotope analysis of a gold-wire stud from Bush Barrow,* Unpublished report: University of Southampton.

Tsoraki, C., Barton, H., Crellin, R.J., Harris, O.J.T. (2020) Making marks meaningful: new materialism and the microwear assemblage, *World Archaeology* 52, 484-502.

University of Leicester, n.d., *Beyond the three age system*, https://le.ac.uk/archaeology/research/new-approaches-to-the-material-world/beyond-the-three-age-system [accessed 5/5/2022].

Verkooijen, K.M. (2014) *Tears of the Sun: Bronze Age amber spacers from Britain and Europe,* Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Exeter.

Wallis, R. (2014) Re-examining stone 'wrist-guards' as evidence for falconry in later prehistoric Britain *Antiquity* 88, 411-424.

Woodward, A., and Hunter, J. (2011) *An examination of prehistoric Stone Bracers from Britain, Oxford: Oxbow.*

Woodward, A., and Hunter, J. (2015) *Ritual in Early Bronze Age Grave Goods,* Oxford: Oxbow.

4.3 Research priorities

The Early Bronze Age collections are consistently the focus of high-quality research at the highest level, however a number of observations can still be made. A notable feature of the research undertaken into the Museum's Early Bronze Age collections between 2010 and 2021 is a comparative lack of PhD and Masters-level research; of the 27 projects identified by this project just two were theses: Verkooijen (2014) and Copper (2017). On the whole research has been dominated by established researchers often working as part of large-scale, well-funded research projects, and whilst this is not necessarily a negative point, it is in marked contrast to other periods and raises a question as to why, but also what the Museum can do to encourage wider engagement with these collections amongst post-graduate students.

In terms of priorities and opportunities for future research projects, the most glaring absence in the above body of research is the lack of interest in the ceramics of this period, excepting miniature vessels. The results of the Beaker People Project quite substantially compresses the chronological scheme for Beaker vessels suggested by Needham (2005), and it remains to be seen if this will lead to subsequent projects reviewing the chronology of Collared Urns, or domestic beaker assemblages. Such a project would require a national review, although the Museum's collections could be incorporated into a pilot or case study. Projects which may finally lead to the publication of the Avebury G44 and Bishops Cannings G61/62a excavations should also be encouraged.

Unfortunately, despite the interesting results of Wilkin's (2011) literature-based based review of deliberate inclusions of animal remains in Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age graves, it is doubtful that a more detailed research project could be built off of its back. Reflecting the attitudes identified by Banfield (2018) in the Neolithic (see **3.2.1**), it is doubtful that a significant proportion of the animal bone assemblages are extant. This lack of interest in the material is reflected in the discrepancy between the descriptions of a probable collection of burnt animal remains deposited under a food vessel at Snail Down in the preliminary report (Thomas and Thomas 1955) and the deposit of "greyish soil" described in the final publication (Thomas 2005: 27). As further recent excavation archives are deposited however, this may be a theme that could be explored.

Table 1: Table showing the correspondence between Human Remains, Funerary vessels, and other grave goods in the collections. Abbreviations: MV= Miniature vessel; B= Beaker; FV= Food vessel; CU= Collared urn; O= Other/Unknown.

Site	Human remains	Vessel	Grave Goods
Amesbury G11			Yes
Amesbury G15			Yes
Amesbury G19		MV	
Amesbury G19a		MV	
Amesbury G39		B?	Yes
Amesbury G4			Yes
Amesbury G41			Yes
Amesbury G46			Yes
Amesbury G48			Yes
Amesbury G51		B	Yes
Amesbury G54		B	Yes
Amesbury G56			Yes
Amesbury G57	I		
Ann Hill	C	CU	Yes
Avebury G13c			Yes
Avebury G23c		MV	Yes
Avebury G55		MV	Yes
Bishops Cannings G11/12			Yes
Bishops Cannings G61	I		
Boynton G4a		MV	
Bromham G2	C	MV	Yes
Charnage Furze		MV	
Codford G4b	I		
Codford G5	C		
Collingbourne Ducis G21c			Yes
Collingbourne Ducis G4			Yes
Collingbourne Kingston G23b	C	B, MV	
Collingbourne Kingston G4			Yes
Collingbourne Kingston G6	C, I	B, MV	Yes
Collingbourne Kingston G8	C	B	Yes
Durrington G14			Yes
Durrington G36		B, MV	
Durrington G47			Yes
Durrington G65c		MV	
Durrington Sarsen Burial			Yes
Edington G2			Yes
Figheldean G25	I	B, FV	Yes
Kilmington G1			Yes
Kilmington G2a		B	
Knighton Down Barrow			Yes

Knook G1a			Yes
Larkhill Camp	I		
Mere G6a		B	Yes
Milston G3/7			Yes
Milston G51			Yes
Milton Lilbourne G4	C	MV	
Milton Lilbourne G5	C	CU	
Monkton Down		MV	Yes
Netheravon Flying School a	I	B	Yes
Netheravon Flying School b	I	B	
Norton Bavant G2			Yes
Preshute G1a		MV, CU	Yes
Roundway G5b	I		Yes
Roundway G8	I	B	Yes
Roundway G9	I	B	
Sack Hill	I		
Shrewton G1/2/3			Yes
South Newton G1			Yes
Sutton Veny G11a			Yes
Sutton Veny G11c			Yes
Upavon Flying School	I	B	
Upton Lovell G1			Yes
Upton Lovell G2			Yes
Upton Lovell G2a			Yes
Upton Lovell G2e		MV, CU	Yes
Warminster G10			Yes
Warminster G6		MV	
West Overton G1			Yes
West Overton G4			Yes
West Overton G6b		B, CU	Yes
Wilsford G1		B	Yes
Wilsford G15			Yes
Wilsford G16			Yes
Wilsford G18			Yes
Wilsford G23			Yes
Wilsford G27			Yes
Wilsford G2b		B	
Wilsford G3			Yes
Wilsford G32			Yes
Wilsford G36f	I	MV	
Wilsford G38	C		
Wilsford G39	I		Yes
Wilsford G40		MV	Yes
Wilsford G42			Yes
Wilsford G43			Yes
WIlsford G46			Yes
Wilsford G47/49/50a			Yes
Wilsford G5			Yes
Wilsford G51	I	B	Yes
Wilsford G52	I		Yes
Wilsford G54	I		Yes
Wilsford G56			Yes
Wilsford G58			Yes
Wilsford G60			Yes
Wilsford G62		B	

Wilsford G64			Yes
Wilsford G65		FV	Yes
Wilsford G7		MV	Yes
Wilsford G8		MV, CU	Yes
Wimbourne St. Giles G17		CU	Yes
Wimbourne St. Giles G18			Yes
Wimbourne St. Giles G19			Yes
Wimbourne St. Giles G20			Yes
Wimbourne St. Giles G3		CU	Yes
Wimbourne St. Giles G33a		MV	Yes
Wimbourne St. Giles G4		O	Yes
Wimbourne St. Giles G8			Yes
Wimbourne St. Giles G9			Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G10		B	
Winterbourne Stoke G13		FV	Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G14		MV	Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G16a		MV	
Winterbourne Stoke G28		FV	Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G4			Yes

Winterbourne Stoke G42			Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G43	I		
Winterbourne Stoke G47		CU	
Winterbourne Stoke G5		O	Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G54		B	Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G56			Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G58a		MV	Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G59a		FV	
Winterbourne Stoke G64a			Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G64b		MV	
Winterbourne Stoke G65		MV	
Winterbourne Stoke G66		CU	Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G67			Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G68		MV	Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G8		MV	Yes
Winterbourne Stoke G9		MV	