

5. Middle Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age (c. 1,600-100 BC)

5.1 Summary of the Collections

5.1.1 Archaeology

In contrast to the extremely rich Early Bronze Age collections, the Museum holds relatively little material for the Middle Bronze Age and initial phase of the Late Bronze Age (1,600- c. 1,000 BC). This, in part, probably reflects a change in focus away from the Stourhead Collection's emphasis on the Stonehenge landscape, and towards the Vale of Pewsey and North Wiltshire Downs. Extensive wetlands in the Vale appear to have acted as a barrier to settlement prior to the Late Bronze Age (Tubb 2011), and the only sites on which Deverell-Rimbury period ceramics have been found were both excavated during the Marlborough Downs project, at Dean Bottom and Bishops Cannings Down (Gingell 1980; 1992). These settlements also produced a small amount of Middle Bronze Age metalwork and other material culture, including a fragmentary dirk and palstave at Bishops Cannings Down.

The Museum holds just 31 palstave axeheads, mostly historic chance finds with imprecise provenances, whilst the number of Middle Bronze Age dirks and rapiers is negligible. A large proportion of the Middle Bronze Age metalwork held by the museum also appears to have been deposited much later in the period. For instance, eight palstave axeheads were deposited as part of the Late Bronze Age hoard of socketed axeheads at Manton Weir Farm (Lawson 2011), whilst the Middle Bronze Age blade deposited with the Melksham hoard of phalerae and spearheads in the Earliest Iron Age was presumably already centuries old (Gingell 1979; Osgood 1995). An exception to this is a

hoard of metalwork from Heywood, in the west of the county, which was recently acquired through the treasure process (2019T488). This hoard comprised of Taunton phase material (c. 1,400-1,200 BC), and included a palstave, quoit-headed pin and liss-style bracelet more commonly seen in Hampshire or Northern France.

The collections are similarly limited in relation to the Ewart Park phase (c. 1100-800) metalwork, contemporary with the Late Bronze Age. The Museum holds just 42 socketed axeheads attributable to this phase, most with similar issues of provenance to the palstaves held in the collections. Almost half of these axeheads come from two hoards deposited at Manton Weir Farm (Lawson 2011), although it has been argued that one of these hoards was deposited at the transition to the Llyn Fawr metalworking phase (c. 800-600), contemporary with the Early Iron Age (see Boughton 2015, 5.2).

By far the most significant assemblages held in the collections dating to this period derive from the excavations of a number of 'midden' sites, especially around the Vale of Pewsey. These sites include Potterne (Lawson 2000), East Chisenbury (McOmish et al. 2010), All Cannings Cross (Cunnington 1923), and more limited excavations at Stanton St. Bernard (Barrett and McOmish 2009). An unpublished assemblage of contemporary pottery from Roughridge Hill, Bishops Cannings, potentially suggests a further midden at this site (Robinson and Swanton 1993). These sites are characterised by colossal build-ups of artefact-rich dark earth, often large enough to be mistaken for topographical features (e.g. McOmish et al. 2010). Ewart Park metalwork was found at both Potterne (Lawson 2000) and

All Cannings Cross (Cunnington 1923) implying that activity had began by the tenth century BC. The midden sites are typically understood as the result of periodic feasting events, which cumulatively created extensive deposits rich in ceramics and animal bone, as well as metalwork and other material culture.

In particular, the sites are known for a distinctive form of decorated Post-Deverell-Rimbury ceramics often referred to as All Cannings Cross type wares, and which is characteristic of the Earliest Iron Age in the region (Barrett 1980) and it is on the basis of the absence of later scratch-cordoned wares that it is assumed the middens were out of use by sixth or fifth century BC (Morris 2000; Raymond 2010, Tubb 2011). The exception has previously been All Cannings Cross, where the presence of La Tene I and II brooches suggests that activity at that site may have continued into the Middle Iron Age (Cunnington 1923; Adams 2013; Waddington et al. 2019), however, recent radiocarbon dating has shown that the lives of middens may have been much longer than previously thought (see Waddington et al. 2019, 5.2). Notwithstanding a lack of clarity in terms of stratigraphy in Cunnington's original publication of All Cannings Cross (Cunnington 1923), these sites, represent a nationally important group which are vitally important in our understanding of the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age transition in Southern Britain. It is little surprise that they have been the focus of significant academic attention (McOmish 1996; Bradley and McOmish 2006; Serjeantson 2007; Tullet 2008; 2010; Tullet and Harrison 2008; Tubb 2011; Waddington 2010).

The above are not the only assemblages dating to this period in the collections, and the Museum holds a substantial number of site assemblages dating to the Early and Middle Iron

Age (c. 800-100 BC), although most derives from historic excavations. The settlement at Battlesbury Bowl, Warminster, is an exception, and the only site to have been excavated since 1990. The ceramic sequence at the site dates occupation to c. 800-300 BC (Ellis and Powell 2008), and in addition to the ceramics, a well stratified assemblage of animal bone and other material culture also survives from the site. In particular, the animal bone assemblage from Battlesbury Bowl represents one of the largest of this period in the country (Hambleton and Maltby 2004), further complementing the substantial assemblages from Potterne and East Chisenbury.

Cow Down, Longbridge Deverill, in the west of the county, is another useful assemblage as although the excavation was undertaken in the mid twentieth century, its publication has occurred only relatively recently (Brown 2012). Excavations identified a series of roundhouses associated with All Cannings Cross-type vessels, which were then superseded by a series of pits containing ceramics datable to Middle Iron Age transition (Brown 2012). Despite the relatively early date of the excavations, substantial quantities of animal bone are held by the Museum from this site, along with the substantial ceramic and smaller metalwork assemblages. The other sites dating to this period in the Museum collections were excavated in the early 20th century, and whilst lacking the stratigraphic detail of more recent excavations, they nonetheless collectively represent an excellent resource for the study of this period: these include Swallowcliffe Down (Clay 1927), Fifield Bavant Down (Clay 1924), Chisenbury Trendle (Cunnington 1932b), Lidbury Camp (Cunnington 1919) and Figsbury Rings (Cunnington 1927), as well as the earliest phases

of occupation at Casterley Camp (Cunnington and Cunnington 1913).

Other assemblages within the Museum collections still await full publication, such as a small assemblage from Upton Cow Down, Westbury, and the material from Grimes' excavation of Scratchbury Camp. Finally, an important, if poorly understood, assemblage of early iron age material, including a rare iron socketed axehead, was excavated by Nan Kivell at Cold Kitchen Hill (Nan Kivell 1926; 1926). Unfortunately, the publication of this site is well known for being extremely lacking in detail, and no original records survive.

5.1.2 Human remains

In addition to the material discussed above, the Museum also holds a small, but still significant, collection of human remains. Most notably among these are the human remains from Potterne, which were mostly disarticulated, and Battlesbury Bowl. The Museum also holds human remains from All Cannings Cross, East Chisenbury, Lidbury Camp and Cow Down.

5.2 Research summary

5.2.1 Summary

The Museum's Early and Middle Iron Age collections are substantial, and the material sees a considerable amount of academic interest. Although typically not as high profile as the research into the Early Bronze Age, in terms of the number of research projects and the number of results fed back to the Museum, this period has a larger profile. It is also notable that it receives interest from researchers at a greater variety of stages in their academic career.



Figure 5.1: Dr Richard Madgwick examines animal bone from Potterne.

Research into the Pewsey middens drives the lion's share of interest in this period. In particular, the work of Dr Richard Madgwick and his colleagues and students at Cardiff University into animal bone from these sites has been significant (Figure 5.1). These studies range from more traditional zooarchaeological studies at MSc level (Simms 2019; Figgitt 2019), through to the novel application of macroscopic and microscopic surface analyses (Faillance et al. 2020; Madgwick 2014; 2016; Madgwick and Mullville 2012; 2015) and scientific analyses of isotopic evidence (Madgwick et al. 2012). The substantial animal bone assemblage from Potterne has also been successfully employed in two aDNA analyses: both as a control in a study of goat domestication (Daly et al. 2018), and in a study of the distribution of ancient mice species in Europe (Rodriguez 2019). Waddington et al.'s (2019) recent use of Bayesian modelling on radiocarbon dates obtained using samples of animal bone and ceramic residues from East Chisenbury is particularly significant, and has

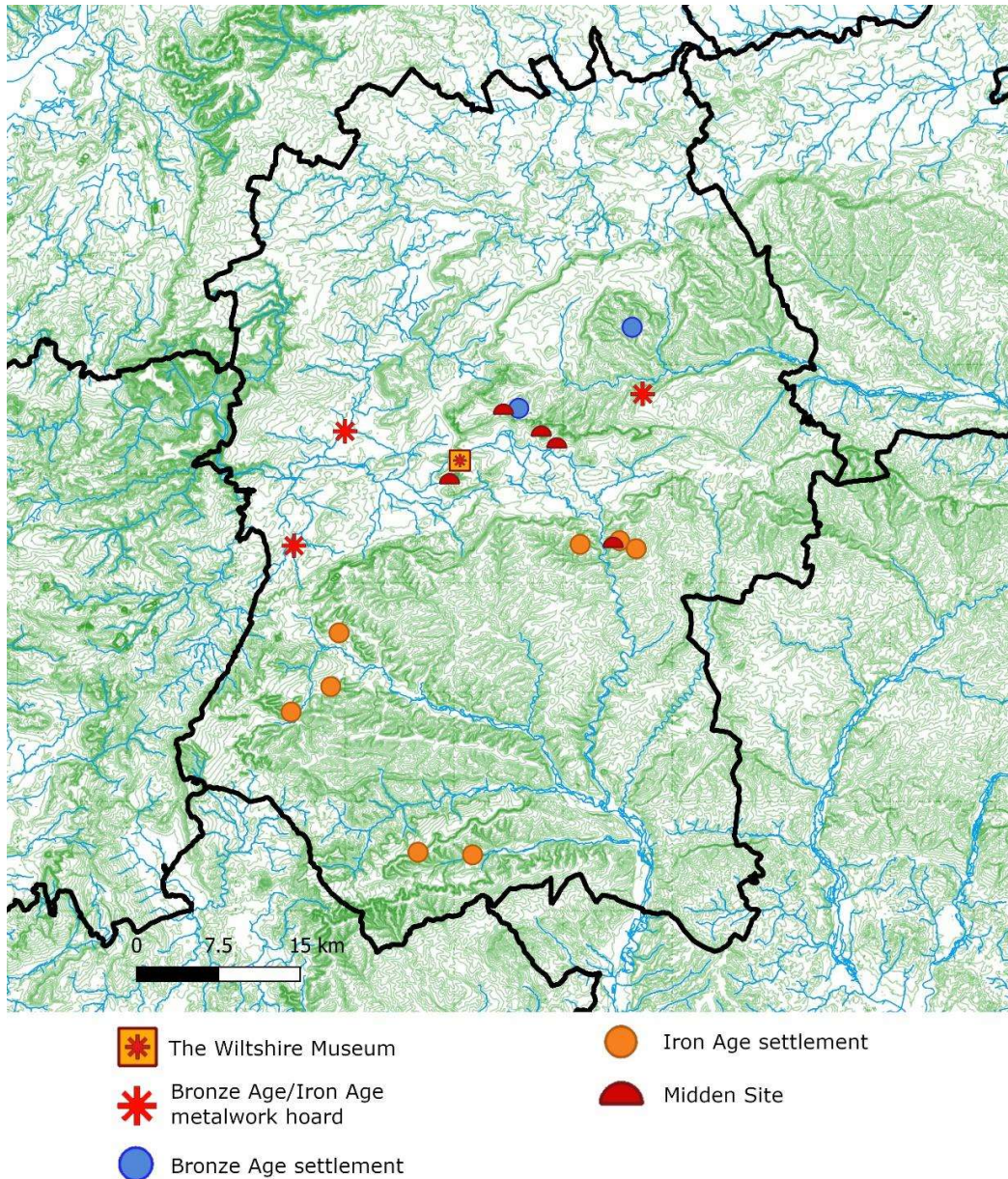


Figure 5.2: Map showing the distribution of key sites mentioned in the text. Image contains Ordnance Survey data, crown copyright 2022.

completely altered our understanding of the site's development, extending activity at the site far later than was previously thought.

The artefactual middens from Potterne and the other midden sites have also been accessed, although not to nearly the same extent as the animal remains. The only dedicated study

of material from these midden sites has been Brück and Davies' (2018) study of shale armlets from Potterne, discussing the potential for deliberate breakage as part of the feasting activity on the site.

Other studies to utilise the Museum collections in this period have typically been part

of much larger national or international surveys of particular artefact categories, such as metal working debris (Webley et al. 2020), glass beads (Foulds 2014), quoit-headed pins (Lawson 2019) and loomweights (Shaffrey 2017). Adams (2013; *forthcoming*) has discussed a number of brooches in the collections dating to this period, and has recently been able to use the well recorded assemblage from Battlesbury Bowl in a radiocarbon dating project to help refine their dating. Hermann et al.'s (2020) survey of prehistoric balance arms in Europe has identified a new example from Potterne, previously identified as a bobbin, which is now only the second known in the UK, both reinforcing the importance of the site, as well as demonstrating the variety of activities which took place there.

There has been a small number of projects researching particular categories of metal artefact. Boughton (2015) has examined the socketed axeheads in the collections as part of a national study of Early Iron Age axehead forms. On the basis of the composition of one of the Manton Wier Farm hoards, which she argues contains multiple axeheads from the same mould, she suggests that the group was likely deposited at the cusp of the Early Iron Age, and is an important transitional hoard. In addition, Lee (2014) and Fregni (2014) have examined Bronze Age tools in the collections, investigating what they can tell us about ancient woodworking and metalworking respectively.

Finally, and as with the Early Bronze Age, human remains from a number of sites have been sampled for radiocarbon, isotopic and aDNA analyses, the first results of which are beginning to be published (Patterson et al. 2021). Whilst grand narratives of genetic shifts are undoubtedly attention grabbing, simply having this corpus of up-to-date radiocarbon dates is extremely useful for our understanding

of sites, and will undoubtedly inform future research.

5.2.2 Research projects and publications

Adams, S. (2013) *The first brooches in Britain: from manufacture to deposition in the Early and Middle Iron Age*, Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Leicester.

Adams, S. (in prep.) *Setting artefacts free*

Boughton, D. (2015) *The early Iron Age axes of Britain*, Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Central Lancashire.

Brück, J., and Davies, A. (2018) The Social Role of Non-metal 'Valuables' in Late Bronze Age Britain, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 28, 665-688.

Daly, K., Mullin, V., and others (2018) Ancient goat genomes reveal mosaic domestication in the Fertile Crescent, *Science* 361, 85-88.

Faillance, K.E., Foody, M.G.B., and Madgwick, R. (2020) Exploring the potential of TEM analysis for understanding cooking at prehistoric feasting sites *Scientific Reports* 10, 13635.

Figgitt, J. (2019) *Black earth sites: an investigation of two late Bronze Age/early Iron Age midden sites, All Cannings Cross and Stanton St. Bernard, Vale of Pewsey, Wiltshire*, Unpublished MSc thesis: University of Cardiff.

Foulds, E. (2014) *Glass Beads in Iron Age Britain: A Social Approach*, Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Durham.

Fregni, E.G. (2014) *The compleat metalsmith: craft and technology in the British Bronze Age*, Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Sheffield.

Hambleton, E. (2013) *The life of things long dead: A biography of Iron Age animal skulls from*

Battlesbury Bowl, Wiltshire, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 23, 477-494.

Hermann, R., Steinhoff, J., Schlotzhauer, P., and Vana, P. (2020) Breaking News! Making and testing Bronze Age balance scales *Journal of Archaeological Science* 32, 1-18.

Lawson, A.J. (2019) Quoit-headed pins: A consideration of the type in the light of Norfolk examples, *Norfolk Archaeology* 48, 155.

Lawson, A.J., Robinson, P., and Swanton, G. (2011) Bronze Age metalwork from Manton Copse, Preshute, Wiltshire, *WANHM* 104, 31-43.

Lee, R. (2014) *Influences of wood-crafting on technological development in Middle to Late Bronze Age Southern England*, Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Southampton.

Madgwick, R. (2014) What makes bones shiny? Investigating trampling as a cause of bone abrasion *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* 6, 163-173.

Madgwick, R. (2016) New Light on feasting and deposition: exploring accumulation history through taphonomic analysis at later prehistoric middens in Britain, *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* 8, 329-341.

Madgwick, R., and Mulville, J. (2012) 'Investigating Variation in the Prevalence of Weathering in Faunal Assemblages in the UK: A Multivariate Statistical Approach' *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 22, 509-522.

Madgwick, R., and Mulville, J. (2015) Reconstructing depositional histories through bone taphonomy: extending the potential of faunal data, *Journal of Archaeological Science* 53, 255-263.

Madgwick, R., Mulville, J., and Stevens, R. (2012) Diversity in foddering strategy and herd

management in late Bronze Age Britain: An isotope investigation of pigs and other fauna from two midden sites, *Environmental Archaeology* 17, 126-140.

Patterson, N., Isakov, M., Booth, T. [and others] (2022) Large-scale migration into Britain during the Middle to Late Bronze Age, *Nature* 601, 588–594.

Rodriguez, L. (2019) *Comparative phylogeography as an integrative approach to understand human and other mammal distributions in Europe*, Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Bournemouth.

Shaffrey, R. (2017) 'A re-investigation of British stone loomweights' in Shaffrey, R. (ed) *Written in stone: papers on the function, form and provenancing of Prehistoric Stone objects in memory of Fiona Roe*, Highfield Press, pp. 229-248.

Simms, A. (2019) *Food for feasts: analysis of animal husbandry regimes and carcass processing at two late Bronze Age/early Iron Age middens in the Vale of Pewsey, Wiltshire*, Unpublished MSc thesis: University of Cardiff.

Waddington, K., Bayliss, A., Higham, T., Madgwick, R., and Sharples, N. (2019) 'Histories of deposition: creating chronologies for the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age transition in Southern Britain' *Archaeological Journal* 176, 84-133.

Webley, L., Adams, S., and Brück, J. (2020) *The Social Context of Technology: Non-Ferrous Metalworking in later Prehistoric Britain and Ireland*, *Prehistoric Society Research paper 11*, Oxford: Oxbow.

5.3 Research priorities

Research into the osseous assemblages of this period are consistently producing extremely interesting results, be it recent research into human aDNA, or the ongoing research into the animal bone assemblages of midden sites led by Dr Richard Madgwick and the FeastNet project. Beyond noting that it is hoped that some of the smaller-scale pilot studies will be applied to larger samples (e.g. Madgwick 2015; Faillance et al. 2020), this document has little to add. What is clear, however, is the obvious benefits of the successful working relationship the museum has been able to build with Dr Madgwick in terms of driving long term research interest. This has included both post-doctoral research, but also research at a PhD and MSc level, and building similar such relationships with other researchers and institutions should be seen as a priority.

The museum would also like to encourage research projects which utilise the wider assemblages from Potterne and other midden sites. As Brück and Davies (2018), and Hermann et al.'s (2020) research demonstrate, varied avenues are left to be explored. In particular, there has been very little use of the substantial ceramic collections associated with this period identified in this study. Waddington et al. (2019) have sampled preserved residues on ceramic sherds from East Chisenbury, whilst prior to this Copley et al. (2005) had sampled ceramics from Potterne for lipid analysis. Whilst further scientific analyses would be welcomed, it is especially felt that in light of the recent redating of East Chisenbury a study of the chronology of the All Cannings Cross Ware ceramic industry is now long overdue (Tubb 2011: 195). Whilst the Danebury excavations provide an excellent type series for regional Early Iron Age ceramics (Cunliffe 1984), it has now been over 40 years since Barrett's (1980) review

of Late Bronze Age ceramics. Both were completed prior to the publication of Gingell's (1992) Marlborough Downs Project and the excavations of either Potterne (Lawson 2000), or East Chisenbury (McOmish 1996; McOmish et al. 2010). Barrett noted the apparent lack of an initial 'plain' series of Post-Deverill-Rimbury fabrics bridging the gap between Middle Bronze Age Deverill-Rimbury Wares and Early Iron Age All Cannings Cross-type fabrics in the region. Similarly, the unexpectedly late sequence of radiocarbon dates at East Chisenbury (Waddington et al. 2019) asks questions of our understanding of their later currency, and raises the possibility of a longer chronology at Potterne than has previously been assumed. The absence of Scratch-cordoned bowls at these sites cannot be seen as a reliable chronological indicator in light of Waddington et al.'s (2019) work, as is indeed also suggested by their relative scarcity on a number of sites known to have been occupied in this period, for instance at Cow Down, Longbridge Deverill, where they are noted as being almost totally absent (Brown 2012), as well as others (Cunliffe 1984: 254). Unexpectedly late radiocarbon dates were also encountered at Battlesbury Bowl, where the final phase of burials was much later than was implied by the Middle Iron Age ceramics in their grave fills and the site more generally (Ellis and Powell 2008: 40-42). Together this suggests there continue to be gaps in our understanding of the local ceramic sequence.

The increasing evidence for later occupation at the midden sites around the Vale of Pewsey also now increases the range of contemporary overlap with a number of the Early to Middle Iron Age settlements excavated during the twentieth century. Unfortunately, these site archives have seen little to no use in recent research. The result of this is that for

display purposes the museum holds a number of interesting site assemblages dating to this period, but only a very crude understanding of both the development of the sites from which they were excavated, but also a largely non-existent holistic understanding of how all of these sites interacted on a landscape scale. As such the Museum would like to encourage research projects which can further develop our understanding of these sites, and whilst in some cases fieldwork may be beneficial, for example

Foulds et al.'s (2014) geophysical survey on Swallowcliffe Down, as Guido and Smith's (1981) identification of Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceramics amongst the finds assemblage from Figsbury Rings demonstrates, there will be value in simply returning to the surviving material archives. Similarly, unpublished archives such as that from Scratchbury Camp, and the field walked assemblage from the probable midden at Bishop's Cannings both also await analysis and publication.