

Whitehorse  
Hill:  
A Prehistoric  
Dartmoor  
Discovery

13.09.14-  
13.12.14

Teachers Pack



## CONTENTS

About the Teachers Pack	05
Introduction to the exhibition	05
Prehistoric Britain - Timeline	05
What changed? Technology, travel and religion in the Early Bronze Age	07
Objects from Whitehorse Hill	10
Ideas for activities in School	17
What can we do for you?	19
How to book a visit	19
Further resources	19

## About the Teachers Pack

The aim of this pack is to provide a way to look at, learn from, and engage with the Early Bronze Age finds included in the exhibition **Whitehorse Hill: A Prehistoric Dartmoor Discovery** at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, 13 September to 13 December 2014.

Elements of this pack can support your visit to the exhibition, and can also be adapted for use in the classroom pre- or post- visit.

Please refer to page 19 for guidance on how to book a visit.

# Prehistoric Britain - Timeline

**Palaeolithic** c800,000 – 10,000 BC

**Mesolithic** c10,000 – 4,500BC

**Neolithic** c4,500 – 2,500 BC

**Bronze Age** Early - c2,500 – 1,500 BC  
Middle – c1,500 – 1000 BC  
Late – c1,000 – 700 BC

**Iron Age** c700 BC – 43 AD

**Roman Britain** 43 – 409 AD

# Introduction to the exhibition



## Introduction to the exhibition

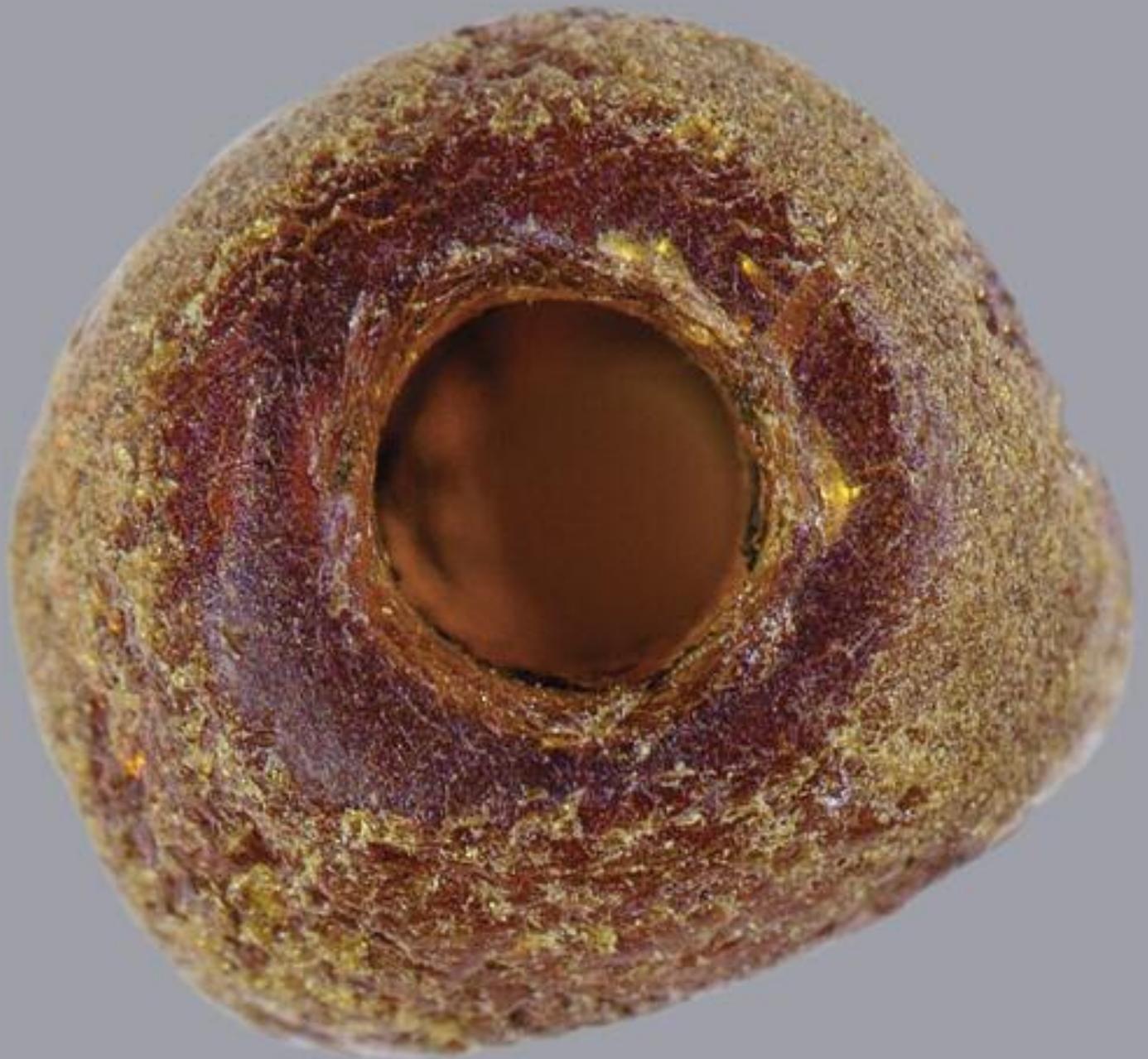
---

In 2011, an excavation at Whitehorse Hill on northern Dartmoor uncovered a cremation burial. Radiocarbon dating suggests an Early Bronze Age date, around 1900-1500BC, for this burial. This discovery is now considered to be the most important assemblage of prehistoric grave goods ever recovered from Dartmoor, and indeed from the whole of the South West of England. The survival of the organic remains is of international importance.

This individual, whose cremated remains were placed in a cist on this remote spot on Northern Dartmoor, over four thousand years ago, was apparently of some importance to the local community. Along with cremated remains, textiles, woven baskets, animal skins, beads, wooden ear studs were all found, along with the first tin artefacts found in a prehistoric context.

These finds are of national importance, and are a significant addition to the already rich archaeology collections at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.

# What changed? Technology, Travel and Religion in the Early Bronze Age



**What changes took place in Britain that can define the difference between Neolithic culture, and the Bronze Age? Some practices were carried over into the Bronze Age, such as living together in communities, and farming. Other elements are far more difficult to uncover, such as the religious beliefs of the time, due to the lack of written and archaeological evidence. We'll explore a few changes here:**

## Technology

---

### Bronze

We'll start with the big one – bronze. The material that gave its name to this period in British history played a significant role in changing the way people lived. Bronze is an alloy of copper and a small amount of tin, the combination of the two makes for a far harder material. Arsenic is also occasionally added to the mix, and again this is found in large quantities in Devon. The earliest known bronze objects in Britain date from around 2150 BC, a few hundred years earlier than the finds from Whitehorse Hill.

Although the Bronze Age marks the period when metalworking first began in Britain, it did not lead to the sudden abandonment of the earlier way of life enjoyed during the Neolithic period. The use of metal was to have a gradual impact but there was no sudden abandonment of older traditions such as hunting and of the use of flints for making tools. By the late Bronze Age, bronze objects were more commonplace, with an abundance of axe-heads still in existence from this period. We have some later Bronze Age axe-heads on display in our Uncovered gallery.

### Mining

Devon and Cornwall have significant deposits of both copper and tin, and these would have certainly been exploited during the Bronze Age as the demand for bronze goods increased. The burial at Whitehorse Hill included a barrel-shaped tin bead, and a spectacular tin-studded wrist/arm band, which do provide some evidence for tin mining at this early date. By around 1600 BC - around the time of the Whitehorse Hill burial - the Southwest of Britain was experiencing a trade boom as British tin was exported across Europe. It's tempting to think that the relatively high-status of the grave goods associated with the burial at Whitehorse Hill, and the tin artefacts in particular, could mean that the community in which this person lived were in some way connected to this trade boom.

# Travel

---

## International travel

People often assume that international travel is a recent development in people's lives. In fact, international travel was happening in Britain in the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, and probably even earlier. Evidence of this travel can be seen at Stonehenge, the great late-Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age monument in Wiltshire. The 'Amesbury Archer', dated to 2300 BC, and 'Boy with the Amber Necklace', dated c1550 BC, are both burials discovered near to Stonehenge, and both of which are known to have travelled from sites in Europe with their personal possessions, and were ultimately buried in Britain following their European burial practices, which suggests that they didn't travel alone.

If small populations of people were travelling into Britain at that time, then people from Britain must also have been travelling to Europe. At Whitehorse Hill, amber beads were discovered in the burial, similar to the 'Boy with the Amber Beads' burial at Stonehenge, and numerous other burials across Britain. Clearly trade links had at least been established with our European counterparts at that time to allow amber to be imported. It would also have allowed for ideas and ideals to travel between people – no doubt clothing, pottery shapes, body adornments, and even language would have been shaped by these connections.

Later in the Bronze Age, travel was far more frequent. Remains of a Late Bronze Age boat were recently discovered off the coast at Salcombe. The trading vessel was carrying an extremely valuable cargo of tin and hundreds of copper ingots from the Continent when it sank. Archaeologists believe the copper – and possibly the tin – was being imported into Britain and originated in a number of different countries throughout Europe, rather than from a single source, demonstrating the existence of a complex network of trade routes across the Continent.

# Religion

---

## Burial practices

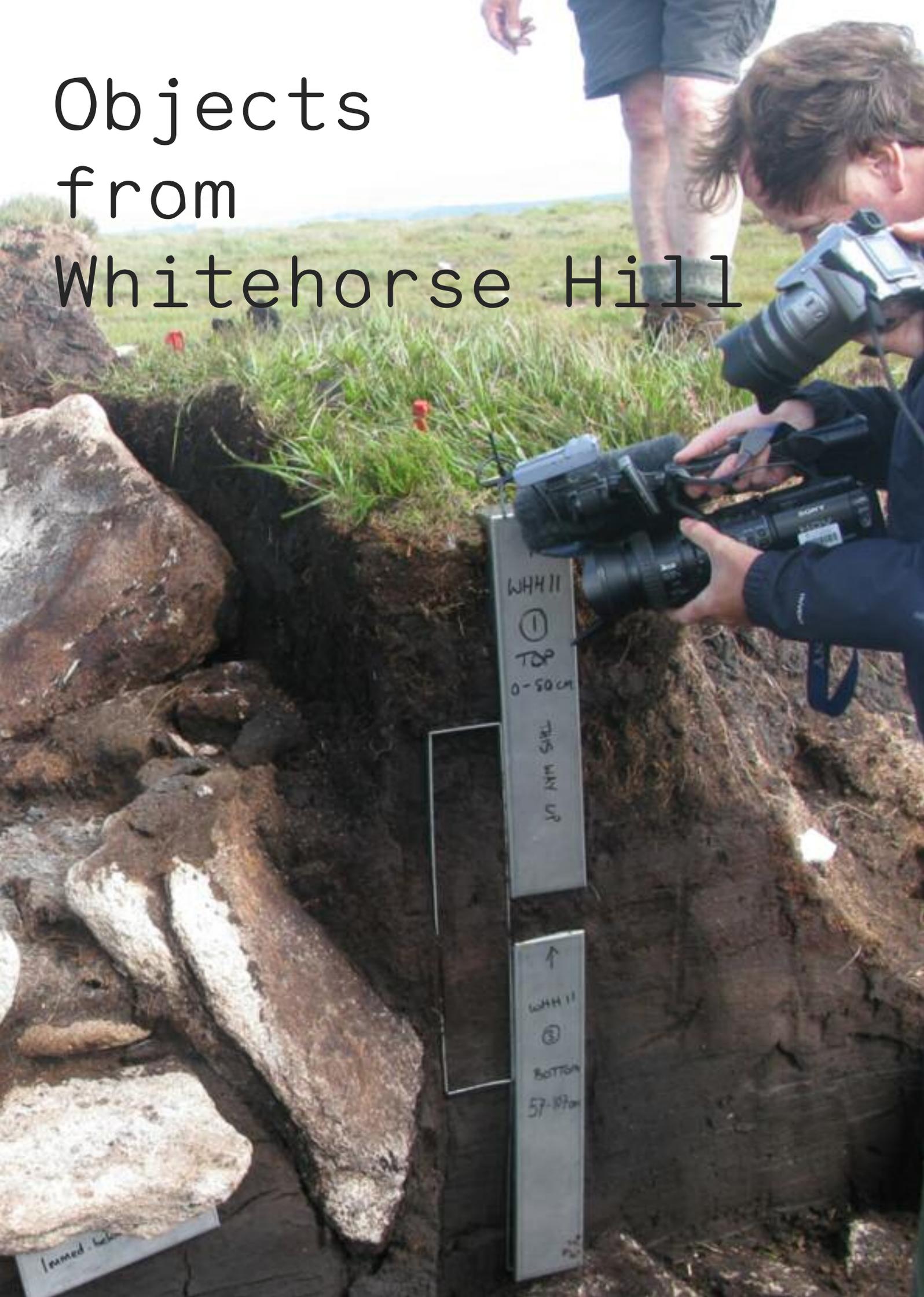
There are well over 1000 burial cairns on Dartmoor. They are not confined to special enclosures like modern cemeteries, instead they are spread throughout the landscape, often in prominent locations. The size and shape of burial cairns on Dartmoor varies greatly. Their diameters range from 2 metres to 40 metres. Some are mounds of earth, turf or stone, others have a kerb of upright stones around the cairn.

Many cairns contain stone built cists (pronounced kist), these are boxes formed by slabs of granite, with a slab laid on top to form a lid. There are over 200 cists on Dartmoor of varying size. Whilst the size of some suggests that they were built to hold inhumations (the whole body), from the available evidence it seems that burial deposits within cists were largely cremations. This form of burial was to remain the norm for the rest of the Bronze Age, but the reason for this change is not known.

The excavation revealed that cremated human bone, together with burnt textile, was wrapped within an animal pelt inside the cist. This was laid on top of a very fine leather and textile object, itself placed on a mat of plant material.

Concealed within the pelt was a beautifully woven basket with its fine stitching still visible. The contents of the bag included over 200 beads, two pairs of wooden studs and a flint tool. A delicate woven band, studded with 32 tin studs lay beneath the bag, possibly this was originally also inside the bag. A layer of plant material covered all these objects.

# Objects from Whitehorse Hill





## Bear pelt

Analysis carried out by a number of specialists has identified the pelt as being from a bear, an incredibly important find. It is probable that this was a native brown bear; the indigenous bear population in Britain became extinct by the Early Medieval period, around 1000AD. Given the other evidence from the burial for trading and possible exchange of exotic items, there is also the possibility that this was a traded item.

The bear pelt was folded around the cremated remains. The quantity and mixture of hair came from the rear end of one animal. It included guard hair, which protected the rest of the pelt from abrasion and moisture, and under hair which provided insulation. It seems that the skin was prepared carefully and used to ensure as little waste as possible.



### Nettle and leather object

Analysis of the skilfully made textile and animal skin object has revealed that this is a band of textile made from finely woven nettle fibre. Stitched to the outer edges of this are two rows of leather binding with a fringe of outward pointing leather triangles made from thin calf skin. This object is unique in North Western Europe. Its fine decorative work suggests it was an item to be worn, possibly as a sash or belt.



### Wrist/arm band

The carefully woven strands of fibre used to craft this delicate band are made from cow hair. The circular domed rivets placed at regular intervals along it are made from tin. Originally these numbered 35 but only 32 survive. The tin has now oxidised but originally would have been silvery and very striking in appearance. The use of tin for decorative objects is exceptionally rare within prehistoric burial contexts in Britain and despite tin being a locally available resource on Dartmoor, this is the first time it has been found within a prehistoric archaeological context.



### Basketry object

The basket, made of lime bast contained most of the beads, the wooden ear studs and a flint flake. It comprises two woven circular discs, forming a flat base and a lid, joined together by a tube made by a coiled basketry technique with coarse stitching around the edges. The stitching was made using cow hair. The bast is the inner bark of the tree; it was retted (soaked in water to help the removal of the fibre from the woody tissue) to render the fibres suitable for basketry.



## Beads

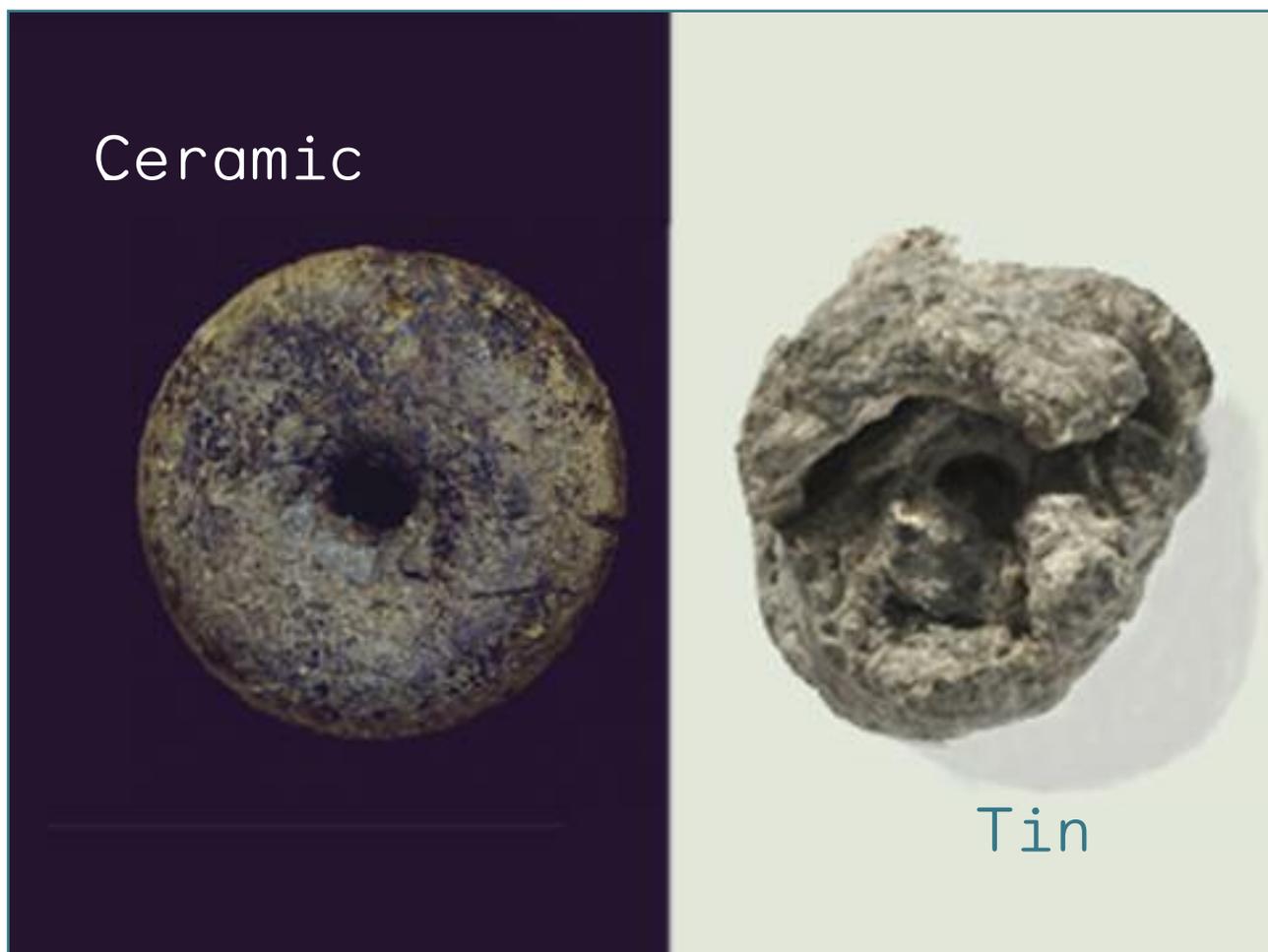
A large group of over 200 beads was discovered partly within the basket and spread out beneath it. This is by far the largest number of beads found from a single early Bronze Age context in South West England. Although no definite stringing has been identified, the number of beads is sufficient to have formed a spectacular necklace.

### Amber

Amber is an exotic resin from the Baltic, associated with supernatural powers, and used as an amulet to ward off evil, harm or illness; the presence of 7 amber beads strongly suggest that this was a high status burial.

### Shale

92 individually perforated disc or sphere-shaped shale beads were also found. The shale has been identified as coming from Kimmeridge in Dorset.



#### Ceramic

There are over 110 chunky clay beads of varying sizes. The clay is not local to Dartmoor.

#### Tin

The discovery of one single large barrel/cylindrical shaped bead made from tin is of great significance.



### Wooden studs

Two pairs of wooden discs with grooves along their edges were also discovered within the basket. The discs were almost perfectly round, each having one side slightly more domed than the other, suggesting they had a specific orientation when in use. One of the discs has been identified as being made from spindle wood which is a hard fine grained tree traditionally used to make small ornamental items. Spindle trees still grow on the lower slopes of Dartmoor.

Likely uses of the studs could be as piercings in ears or elsewhere on the body, or set into leather belts or clothing.

The studs are unique in British prehistory; they also represent the earliest evidence for wood turning in the UK. The discovery of prehistoric worked wood in an upland peat context is also extremely rare.

# Ideas for activities in School



## Prehistoric Timeline

---

Using the basic timeline in this teachers pack (see page 3) as a starting point, why not create a huge timeline of Prehistoric Britain in the classroom? Your class can research key events, known movements and burials of people, and when monuments were erected on Dartmoor, such as the Merrivale stone row, or Grimspound settlement, and across the country, such as Stonehenge.

Whitehorse Hill dates from around 1900 – 1500 BC - older than Tutankhamun's reign in Ancient Egypt, and much older than the Terracotta Army in China. Why not plot dates from other cultures onto your timeline, and see where Whitehorse Hill fits in.

Objects in our Uncovered Gallery and Ancient Egypt galleries may help with your research.

## Materials

---

Explore the materials first developed in the Bronze Age. The clever combination of copper and tin (plus some arsenic occasionally), meant that stronger tools could be developed made out of this new material – bronze. How was this discovered? Could there be any outside influence?

Explore how alloys are made – how might the materials be found in the landscape? How might they be prepared before smelting? What equipment is required to smelt metal? How are the materials changed during the smelting process? Do they remain solid for example? This work will support an element of the Science curriculum.

What other materials were used in prehistory? Were they always metal?

Explore other alloys such as brass, steel, and pewter – what metals must be combined to make these alloys?

## Role play

---

Explore the differences between Prehistoric Britain and Britain today through some short drama pieces devised by the children.

Imagine that we are living in the Early Bronze Age in Plymouth - Plymouth didn't even exist then – imagine that! Have a look around, either out of the window, in the school grounds, or by remembering trips to the City Centre or Hoe.

Can you find a good spot for you to build a house?

What materials might you find nearby to help with this?

Is there anywhere nearby where you could find fresh water?

Where might you find some food?

How might you catch some food?

How might you make some tools to help process your food?

Could you grow some food?

Why all these questions about food? It's making me hungry...

Could you find something nearby to make some beads?

Is there a way of trading goods nearby?

How might you tell other people that you are living in this particular place?

How might you show other people what you beliefs might be?

How might you bury members of your family?

At the end of the lesson, gather the children to discuss what differences there are between Prehistoric Britain and Britain today. How many assumed you could buy all your food from a shop, or had a tap to turn on the water, or even bought a house rather than built it yourself?

## Weave Weave Weave

---

Keeping the current trend for rubber band weaving using a Rainbow Loom in mind, have a close look at the woven wrist/ arm band studded with tin beads found at Whitehorse Hill (page ??). This band was woven by hand, using what we think is horse hair, into an incredibly complex design. It's so complex, that we're not even sure how it was done!

Ask your class to weave complex designs on their Rainbow Loom (if they're not banned in school), using the colourful rubber bands. Could they weave beads into similar positions as the tin beads on the wrist/ arm band?

Why do some people still find it important for us to wear wrist and arm bands today?

Are the wrist bands made by the children individual, or do they all look similar?

Do they share designs with their friends, or do they keep the best ones for themselves?

Do they ever swap particular coloured rubber bands with each other?

## What can we do for you?

We are able to offer schools various options when visiting the exhibition. Visits can be arranged for anywhere between one class to an entire school. In many cases, a member of staff can be present to facilitate your visit. We are also very happy for you to visit as a self-directed group.

The exhibition provides a perfect opportunity for your pupils to experience artefacts and stories from the Bronze Age first hand – and will act as a starting point for working in sketchbooks, fact finding, and talking about the themes that surround the exhibition.

## How to book a visit

---

### Booking in advance is essential for visits

We want to ensure your group has the best experience possible when visiting, so please remember to contact us first before organising your trip. We are very popular with schools, colleges and other user groups, so our galleries can get very busy from time to time.

For enquiries for school visits, contact [museumvisits@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:museumvisits@plymouth.gov.uk). Please have a range of possible dates available before contacting us, as it may not always be possible to offer you your first choice date.

Please remember to bring along sketchbooks and pencils for your visit, as wet materials, and also dusty materials will not be permitted in the exhibition galleries. If you have any questions regarding materials, please contact us using the email above.

## Further resources

---

Many of our previous Teachers Packs, Notes, and Resources are available as PDF downloads from our website - [www.plymouth.gov.uk/museumlearningresources.htm](http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/museumlearningresources.htm) and our ISSUU page - <http://issuu.com/plymouthcitymuseumandartgallery>

PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY



Helpful Holidays

