

Here comes the sun...

British Museum acquires
internationally significant
3,000-year-old gold
pendant, found in
Shropshire

Press images: <https://bit.ly/38okB8n>

- **Rare and extraordinarily well-preserved gold sun pendant (or bulla) dating to BCE 1000-800 discovered by metal detectorist.**
- **A masterpiece of European Bronze Age gold work, it is evidence of the importance of the sun in people's beliefs and cosmology during this period**
- **The bulla has been acquired by British Museum for £250,000 with help from Art Fund and the American Friends of the British Museum**
- **It will be lent to Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery, near the find site, for the first public display as part of British Museum's National Programmes**

Neil Wilkin, Bronze Age Curator at the British Museum said 'This is one of the most significant discoveries from this period - the Bronze age or first age of metal - to be made in Britain for more than a century. The elegant form and brilliantly executed decoration of the sun pendant was accomplished with an ingenious skill. It tells us how important the sun - and its path through the sky during the course of the day and the year - was to people's beliefs during this period. Its preservation is such that is difficult to believe that 3,000 years have passed between leaving its maker's hand and being placed inside a museum case'.

In May 2018, a metal detectorist in Shropshire made the find of a lifetime: cushioned by peaty soil for 3,000 years was an astonishingly well-preserved gold pendant decorated on all its shimmering surfaces with semi-circles and geometric motifs. One side shows a stylized sun – a rare and hugely significant addition to the art and iconography of Bronze Age Britain. Solar symbolism is a key element of Bronze Age cosmology and mythology across Europe, but before the discovery of this pendant was very rarely seen on objects found in Britain.

The pendant was immediately reported to the local Finds Liaison Officer for Shropshire & Herefordshire, who notified the Coroner and brought it to the British Museum under the Treasure process. The Coroner found the bulla to be 'Treasure and the independent Treasure Valuation Committee recommended a value of a

quarter of a million pounds to the Secretary of State. In light of the significance of the object, the British Museum was keen to acquire it and with support from Art Fund and the American Friends of the British Museum the pendant has now entered the collection.

The sun pendant, 3.6cm high and 4.7cm wide, is only the second ever found in Britain. The other - now lost - was discovered near Manchester in 1722. The quality of the object was so high that experts of the day believed it must be Roman. It was last recorded in 1806 before disappearing from sight. There are, however, parallels in Ireland – where six similar but not identical gold pendants – have been discovered. This type of pendant is known as a ‘bullia’, after the Latin word for bubble. A bullia is a large hollow pendant made of sheet gold which would have been suspended and probably worn as adornment. The contents of the hollow pendant from Shropshire remain a mystery and are the subject of on-going analysis by scientists at the British Museum.

The pendant is one of a small number of contemporary, precious objects made to celebrate the religious and life-giving power of the sun during the Bronze Age. They have been found across Europe, including the famous Trundholm Sun Chariot from Denmark and the ‘sun discs’ of North-West Europe.

Preliminary fieldwork at the site in Shropshire has been undertaken by the British Museum in collaboration with Trent & Peak Archaeology and University College Cork. The fieldwork has demonstrated that the landscape at the findspot was boggy and wet during the Bronze Age. Curators think that the pendant would have been intentionally cast into this watery location, as wet places such as rivers and bogs were important to Bronze Age religion and votive deposition across Britain and Europe. More fieldwork is planned in order to shed more light on why such a precious jewel was cast into watery darkness.

The Shropshire site has also produced a range of other, important, objects, which are also being examined under the Treasure process and Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery hopes to acquire them. As part of its commitment to sharing the collection as widely as possible across the country, the British Museum will lend the pendant to Shrewsbury Museum for its first public display in November 2020. The hope is to display the pendant alongside these other finds so that visitors have an opportunity to see and admire the extraordinary craftsmanship, beauty and symbolism of the objects near to their find spot and to understand the significance of the local landscape to Bronze Age Britain.

At the British Museum the pendant will be displayed near to other famous Bronze Age objects such as the Mold Gold Cape, which was found relatively close to where the pendant was discovered. Both are witness to the artistic skill and ingenuity of the period, challenging preconceptions that deep history was an ‘uncivilised’ or ‘unskilled’ time.

Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum said ‘This is a wonderful addition to the British Museum’s extraordinary collection. My thanks to Art Fund and the American Friends of the British Museum for their generosity in helping us to acquire

the bulla. I am also personally delighted that the first public display of the object will be in Shropshire. This loan represents the start of a long-term partnership with our colleagues at Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery and will broaden our links with museum partners in the region. The Museum is committed to sharing its collections as widely as possible and building positive and sustainable relationships with a diverse network of partners across the UK.'

Stephen Deuchar, Director of Art Fund, said: "We're delighted that the British Museum is working in partnership with Shrewsbury Museum to ensure the magnificent bulla is put before the people of Shropshire, so near the site of its discovery."

Fay Bailey, Manager of Shropshire Museums said: "The Shropshire Marches Bulla is an unparalleled find of International significance. The discovery of this exceptional object and associated finds helps to deepen our understanding of Bronze Age Britain and confirms that Shropshire has an important story to tell. We are delighted to have the opportunity to establish a long-term partnership with colleagues from the British Museum whose commitment to our region will be invaluable as we redisplay our galleries and set prehistoric Shropshire in a wider, national context."

Lezley Picton, Shropshire Council Cabinet member responsible for culture, said: 'We're thrilled that the Shropshire Marches Bulla will be returning to Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery for its' first public display later this year to allow residents of Shropshire and the West Midlands region opportunity to view this stunning internationally important object.

"The long-term partnership demonstrates the commitment of the British Museum to our region and will no doubt help us raise the profile of Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery and the collections held by Shropshire Museums'.

Further information

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High resolution images and available at

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/lea3kxb6iv95fvk/AABIs5xEJNY1jTus30Gp1nSHa?dl=0>

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About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by the 159,000 members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year, which was won by St Fagans National Museum of History, Cardiff, in 2019, and through a range of digital platforms. www.artfund.org

About Shropshire Museums

In the 1830s, groups of enquiring minds across Shropshire came together to create museums to preserve and celebrate the stories that make the county unique. Early supporters included

Charles Darwin and William Penny Brookes. These early museums were a focus for research and for sharing new ideas and knowledge with a wider public. They are the foundations of the exceptional collections we care for today. Over the years, objects have been donated by members of the community, eager to share their piece of Shropshire's past. Our collection highlights include:

- The county's Geology Collection not only includes scientifically important reference material but also internationally important specimens, such as the Pleistocene Woolly Mammoths from Condoover, reflecting more than 10,000 years of human activity in the county.
- Our large Archaeology Collection contains items of both regional and national significance. Important finds representing Early Prehistory and the Iron Age include the Port-Y-Waen Palaeolithic Harpoon and Iron Age Spoons. We also care for a large and important collection of Bronze Age metalwork and material from excavations such as Bromfield Bronze Age Cemetery.
- Reflecting an aspect of industry in the county and the skills of local people, our Ceramics Collection has developed into one of national importance. The collection consists of around 3,500 pieces of pottery and porcelain, mainly from the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It includes examples of famous tea sets and tiles made by local companies such as Caughley, Coalport, and Maw's & Co., who sold their ware around the world.

Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery (SM&AG) sits proudly in the town square and is the county's flagship museum and art gallery. Visitors will find a full programme of activities including courses, workshops for schools, film showings, weekly toddler groups, holiday activities and one-off incredible events inspired by our temporary exhibitions programme.

About the British Museum's National Programmes

The British Museum has a national presence, working with hundreds of partner organisations across the UK each year through its wide-ranging National Programmes activity. This includes single-object Spotlight Loan tours, touring exhibitions, Partnership Galleries, as well as both short-term and long-term loans, with the lead support of the Dorset Foundation in memory of Harry M Weinrebe. In 2018/19, over 2,800 objects were loaned to 147 venues in the UK, reaching 10.5 million people outside London. National Programmes also facilitates knowledge exchange programmes and trainee schemes to help young people to break into the museum profession. The Museum will continue to develop partnerships across the UK as part of its commitment to sharing the collection as widely as possible.

About the Treasure Act 1996

Under the Treasure Act (www.finds.org.uk/treasure) finders have a legal obligation to report all finds of potential Treasure to the local coroner in the district in which the find was made. The success of the Act is only possible through the work of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, advising finders of their legal obligations, providing advice on the process and writing reports for coroners on Treasure finds.

The Act allows a national or local museum to acquire Treasure finds for public benefit. If this happens a reward is paid, which is (normally) shared equally between the finder and landowner. Interested parties may wish to waive their right to a reward, enabling museums to acquire finds at reduced or no cost. Rewards are fixed at the full market value of the finds, determined by the Secretary of State upon the advice of an independent panel of experts, known as the Treasure Valuation Committee.

The administration of the Treasure process is undertaken at the British Museum. This work involves the preparation of Treasure cases for coroners' inquests, providing the secretariat for the Treasure Valuation Committee, and handling disclaimed cases and the payment of rewards.



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