

# Stunning 3,000-year-old gold pendant to go on public display for the first time

## **A British Museum Spotlight Loan *Gathering light: A Bronze golden sun***

Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery (10 September –  
12 December 2021)

*Supported by the Dorset Foundation*

**Press images:**

Sun pendant: <https://bit.ly/2SmpVaf>

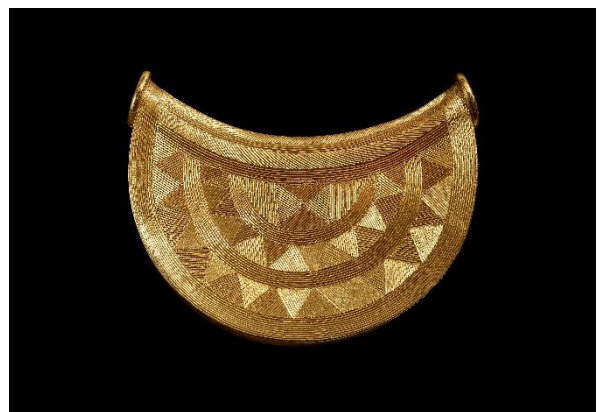
Shrewsbury objects: <https://bit.ly/2P3UUWU>

- **Rare 3,000-year-old sun pendant to be displayed to the public for the first time at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery as part of the British Museum's National Programmes.**
- **Shrewsbury Museum will also be fundraising to acquire other finds close to the findspot, including a unique lead gold-ring parcel and an axe which has the potential to date the transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age.**
- **Most significant piece of Bronze Age gold metalwork found in over a century in Britain – the only example of a British bulla that we currently have.**
- **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.**

An extraordinary **sun pendant is to go on public display for the first time** as part of the British Museum's National Programmes. The sun pendant, also known as a bulla, could be one of the **most significant pieces of Bronze Age metalwork ever discovered in Britain**. The rare and spectacular object will be hosted at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery later this year from September until December as a British Museum Spotlight Loan.

Discovered in the Shropshire Marches in May 2018 by an anonymous metal detector user, nothing like the sun pendant has been found in this country for over a century. Shrewsbury also hopes to acquire other archeologically significant Bronze Age objects from the same findspot and is **launching a crowdfunding campaign** to display these objects at the same time as the sun pendant. These important objects allow visitors an insight into the full historic story an opportunity to admire the extraordinary craftsmanship of the objects close to their discovery spot, and help to understand the significance of the local landscape to Bronze Age Britain.

The sun pendant ([HESH-43148A](#)) is over 3,000 years old, dating between **1000–800BC in the late Bronze Age period**. The elegant form and intricate decoration of the gold pendant includes an exceptionally rare depiction of the sun – not previously seen on objects found in Britain. Solar symbolism was a key element of mythology and belief in



the Bronze Age and this pendant celebrates the life-giving power of the sun during the time of the earliest metalworkers. The sun pendant is therefore a hugely significant addition to knowledge of the art and iconography of Bronze Age Britain.

The sun pendant marks the end of an era as one of the final expressions of an art style and belief system that had lasted for almost 1,500 years. Deposited intentionally in a wetland landscape of bogs and ponds 3,000 years ago, the pendant provides a starting point for discussions about the role of both water and the sun in the religious beliefs and life in deep history. Measuring 3.6cm high and 4.7cm wide, **this bulla is only the second ever found in Britain.** The other Irton bulla – now lost – was discovered near Manchester in 1722 and only known from a picture. Its quality was so high that experts of the day believed it must be Roman. It was last recorded in 1806 before disappearing from records. Curators hope it may one day be rediscovered in a private collection. In Ireland, six similar gold pendants have been found, though these are not identical to this gold pendant.

Alongside the sun pendant, Shropshire Museums are hoping to [crowdfund](#) to be able to acquire other historically significant objects unearthed from the findspot to help tell the complete story of ancient Shropshire. These include an exceptionally rare jewellery parcel wrapped by lead, believed to be one of the **first records of using this material**, and hoards which have the potential to **date the transition between Bronze and Iron Ages**. Shrewsbury Museum will need to raise £40,000 as the reward value of these Treasure objects. Raising this money will enable Shrewsbury Museum to add these objects to their collection, preserve them and display to the public. This vast array of high-quality metalwork from this landscape suggests that the Shropshire site was an important location for a form of religious or ceremonial activity for over a thousand years. These objects and ongoing fieldwork at the findspot reveal important discoveries about this period in British prehistory, advancing our collective archaeological knowledge and understanding of why precious objects would be cast away. Displaying these important objects in situ together for the first time at Shrewsbury Museum would be a unique opportunity for visitors to learn about this historic site.

The objects Shrewsbury are hoping to acquire and display include an unusual **lead parcel** containing two exquisite **gold 'lock-rings'** ([HESH-9EC8BE](#)), which were likely worn as jewellery in hair or clothing. Found close to the sun pendant, X-ray analysis reveals similar decoration. Composed of the same gold and from the same period, there appears close technological, cultural and chronological connections between the sun pendant and this lock-ring parcel.

The lead sheet acted to wrap and conceal the rings in place, though damaging them in the act, and could also have helped 'sink' the light lock-rings when they were deposited in a wet and watery location with limited prospect of recovery. The lead itself may also be considered a significant sacrifice given the importance of lead in both gold and bronze working. Lead was an important ingredient in bronze production but **is rarely found in an unworked state** in Bronze Age hoards – there are only ten other previous examples previously discovered. This is also the first record of this kind of lead artefact to be found in a Late Bronze Age hoard, whilst gold lock-rings themselves have only been found in relatively small numbers – less than 80 examples are known in Ireland, Britain and western France. The combination of lock-ring and lead is completely unique to this parcel. The rarity of the lead and brilliance of the lock-rings indicates that this object is significant both culturally and archaeologically.

The objects Shrewsbury Museum hope to acquire also includes a **rare iron axe** ([HESH-42F213](#)), of which there are fewer than 30 examples, dating to the period 850–

650 BC. This axe is **nationally significant** as it dates the hoard to the very end of the Bronze Age and potentially within the very earliest Iron Age, straddling the transitional period between the Bronze and Iron Ages. This is the period where iron was beginning to be used by metal working smiths in Britain. **Organic material found with this hoard could provide a crucial radiocarbon date for this transition.**

Objects in further hoards that Shropshire Museums hope to acquire include a rare and well-worn cauldron handle as well as weapon fragments that demonstrate significance to our understanding of Bronze Age culture and landscape.

The sun pendant will also star in the British Museum's forthcoming major exhibition on Stonehenge, whilst the Museum is seeking three more museums to host the Spotlight Loan from late 2022 onwards as part of its National Programmes and commitment to sharing the collection as widely as possible across the country. Part of the Spotlight Loan will also include further precious objects yet to be announced. A British Museum Spotlight Loan *Gathering light: A Bronze Age golden sun* will be on display at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery from 10 September until 12 December 2021.

**Neil Wilkin, Curator, Early Europe at the British Museum said:** "The Shropshire sun pendant is an internationally significant object, reflecting the artistic brilliance of communities from the deep past and the social and religious connections that spanned western Europe. It is fantastic that Shrewsbury Museum will have the first opportunity to show the pendant and will do so alongside fantastic objects from their own collections. This will allow the pendant to be set in its landscape and regional context for the first time."

**Fay Bailey, Manager, Shropshire Museums said:** "The Shropshire sun pendant 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 be the first venue to display this remarkable object."

**Maria Bojanowska, Head of National Programmes at the British Museum said:** "The sun pendant is one of the most spectacular objects in our collection. I'm very pleased that through the British Museum's National Programmes, Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery will be the first place that the public can see this remarkable pendant in person and up close."

**Cecilia Motley, Shropshire Council's Portfolio Holder for Communities, Place, Tourism and Transport, said:** "This Shropshire sun pendant is truly an incredible find and one of huge importance. We are delighted that this item, which is 3,000 years old, will go on show to the public for the first time at the Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery.

"This is an exceptionally rare depiction of the sun and undoubtedly one of the most significant finds from the Bronze Age in more than a Century. As it was discovered in the Shropshire Marches, I think it is fitting that Shropshire should be chosen by the British Museum to display it. We are delighted that it will be hosted in the wonderful Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery and I am sure it will be a very popular attraction when it is displayed from September."

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The link for donations to Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery's crowdfunding campaign is as follows: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/keepitinthecounty-1#start>

### **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 2019/20, over 2,800 objects were loaned to 105 venues in the UK, reaching 10 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 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 Conover, 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 Treasure Act 1996**

Under the Treasure Act ([www.finds.org.uk/treasure](http://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 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.

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 Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS)**

Managed by the British Museum (in England) and Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, the PAS is a partnership project, working with about 100 national and local partners to deliver the Scheme's aims. It is funded (in England) through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport grant to the British Museum with local partner contributions. All the Finds Liaison Officers working for the PAS are employed locally but work as a national team directed by the British Museum.

Thousands of archaeological objects are discovered every year, many by members of the public, particularly by people while metal-detecting. If recorded, these finds have great potential to transform archaeological knowledge, helping archaeologists understand when, where and how people lived in the past. PAS ([www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)) offers the only proactive mechanism for recording such finds, which are made publicly available on its online database.

Many organisations have also supported the acquisition of Treasure finds, including Art Fund, the Headley Trust, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund. Without these, as well as public donations, many important archaeological finds would not be in public collections.

### **About Art Fund**

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art and helped the British Museum to acquire the sun pendant. [www.artfund.org](http://www.artfund.org)



For more, follow the British Museum blog at [blog.britishmuseum.org](http://blog.britishmuseum.org)

Images for press can be found here:

Sun pendant: <https://bit.ly/2SmpVaf>

Shrewsbury objects: <https://bit.ly/2P3UUWU>

Contact the Press Office: [communications@britishmuseum.org](mailto:communications@britishmuseum.org)

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