

Snettisham hoard

The Snettisham hoard includes the discoveries from at least 12 separate hoards in Snettisham, Norfolk, England, between 1948 and 1973. These discoveries make up the largest collection of gold, silver and bronze artefacts from the Iron Age in Europe.

The artefacts in the Snettisham hoard are made from precious metals and the gemstone jet. A wide range of items, including rings, bracelets, ingots, 234 coins and over 200 torcs, make up the hoard.



Snettisham hoard

The Snettisham hoard was first discovered when a farmer found a gold torc while ploughing a field in 1948. It was mistaken for a brass bedstead and tossed to the side of the field where it lay for a week. When more fragments of metal were discovered in the field, they were taken to Norwich Castle Museum and their value was recognised.

Many excavations took place in the area where the first artefacts were found, revealing many hoards. A metal detector was used to find hoards buried deep in the ground, sometimes beneath other hoards.

Artefacts from the Snettisham hoard can be seen at Norwich Castle Museum and the British Museum.



What can I see?

The golden objects in the pictures are made from electrum, a mixture of gold, silver and copper. There are rings, bracelets, ingots and coins. An ingot is a block of metal. A torc is a large metal neck ring made from a single piece of metal or many pieces of metal twisted together. Some items seem to be of better quality than others and many of the items are broken or incomplete. The most famous item from the Snettisham hoard is probably the magnificent Great torc.



Great torc

What do I know about the craftspeople who made these artefacts?

The quality of workmanship of the artefacts in the pictures is excellent. The designs are very complex for the time that they were made. Threads of metal are twisted around each other in patterns to make some of the torcs. The ends of the Great torc were cast in a mould and then welded onto the twisted ropes of metal. Different combinations of gold, silver and copper were mixed together to make each item, to either change the colour of the piece or to make the metal easier to work with. Scientists have also discovered that the Celts mixed mercury with gold. They used this mixture to coat bronze objects and jewellery in a process called fire gilding. This made bronze objects look like solid gold. It is likely that the Celts learned how to do this from Spanish traders.

What do I know about the owners of these artefacts?

The jewellery found in Snettisham is very luxurious. Only very rich people from a powerful tribe would have been able to afford such items. Some historians believe that the Iceni tribe were the owners of the Snettisham hoard.

It is possible that the hoards belonged to the workshop that made the jewellery and other artefacts. This would explain the broken or incomplete pieces. It has also been suggested that some of the items from the hoard were deliberately cut into pieces before being buried in the ground, perhaps as a religious offering.



Torc cut into two pieces

