

# Yorkshire Museum

## Chariots, Treasure and Power: Secrets of the Melsonby Hoard Teachers' Exhibition Pack



**Image:** A block of 88 fused iron and copper alloy objects © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

## Chronology: The Iron Age

Email: [schools@ymt.org.uk](mailto:schools@ymt.org.uk)

# Contents

|                                                 |   |
|-------------------------------------------------|---|
| Section One: How to use this resource           | 3 |
| Section Two: Introduction to the Melsonby Hoard | 5 |
| Section Three: Star Objects                     | 7 |

# Section One: How to use this resource

This resource will help you get the most out of a visit to our **Chariots, Treasure and Power: Secrets of the Melsonby Hoard** exhibition at the Yorkshire Museum. It contains:

- An introduction to the **Chariots, Treasure and Power: Secrets of the Melsonby Hoard** exhibition.
- Information about nine **Star Objects** in the exhibition, which you **may wish** to look at with your pupils when visiting.

Each Star Object corresponds to one of our **theories** for why the Melsonby Hoard was buried.

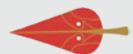
These are:



Feast



Festival



Fight



Funeral

You can use this resource to familiarise yourself with the exhibition **before your visit**. You may find it helpful to **share** these notes with the other **adults** who will be accompanying the class on your visit to the museum.





## Curriculum Links

A visit to our **Chariots, Treasure and Power: Secrets of the Melsonby Hoard** exhibition can be used to cover the following curriculum areas:

### Key Stage Two

Pupils should be taught about:

- Changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age

This could include:

- Iron Age hill forts: tribal kingdoms, farming, art and culture
- A local history study

## Gallery Map

Our **Chariots, Treasure and Power: Secrets of the Melsonby Hoard** exhibition is located on the lower ground floor of the Yorkshire Museum.

You can download a copy of our [Yorkshire Museum: School Visit Map](#) from our website.



# Section Two: Introduction to the Melsonby Hoard

## The Iron Age

- The Iron Age in Britain lasted between **750 BC** and **AD 43**. During the Iron Age:
  - People learned to make **iron**, which they used to create weapons and tools.
  - Iron Age Britons built **hill forts** surrounded by walls and ditches. These were places people lived, traded goods, made things, and held celebrations.
  - Wealthy people owned **horses**, which they used to pull wheeled vehicles like **chariots** and **wagons**.
- The Iron Age ended in AD 43, when the Roman Emperor Claudius **invaded** Britain. Iron Age Britons left no written records so, to learn about them, we must use the **objects** they left behind.



## The Brigantes

- The Brigantes were a powerful Iron Age community who controlled large areas of **northern Britain**, including much of modern-day Yorkshire.
- They built a hill fort at a place called **Stanwick**. We think this is where the **rulers** of the Brigantes lived.
- Objects discovered by **archaeologists** at, or near, Stanwick, tell us the Brigantes were **wealthy** and had connections with people living **in** and **beyond** Britain.



## The Melsonby Hoard

- Around **2000 years** ago, something mysterious happened at a place called **Melsonby**, which is a short walk from the Brigantes' hill fort at Stanwick.
- Here the Brigantes gathered over **800 valuable objects**, including a wine-mixing bowl, chariot parts and a mirror. They then **broke** many of these objects and **buried** them in the ground.
- We believe that the Brigantes buried these objects in the **decades before** the Roman invasion of Britain.
- These objects, which we call the **Melsonby Hoard**, were discovered in 2021. They are being **studied** by archaeologists to see what they can reveal about life in Iron Age Britain.



- Why the Brigantes buried the Melsonby Hoard is a **mystery**. There are four **theories** to investigate in the **Chariots, Treasure and Power: Secrets of the Melsonby Hoard** exhibition:
  - Some of the objects in the hoard were used to serve food and drink. Did the Brigantes bury the Melsonby Hoard after a **feast**?
  - Parts of horse harnesses, chariots and wagons have been found in the hoard. Were these used by the Brigantes in a spectacular **festival** parade before being buried?
  - The Melsonby Hoard contains objects that may have been used in a **fight**, such as spearheads and parts of a shield. Why did the Brigantes want to get rid of these weapons?
  - Archaeologists have found an iron mirror in the Melsonby Hoard. Mirrors are sometimes found in the graves of important Iron Age women. Was the Melsonby Hoard buried as part of the **funeral** celebrations for a queen of the Brigantes?



**Image left:** Image: The Melsonby Hoard was excavated by archaeologists from the University of Durham. © Image courtesy of the Department of Archaeology, Durham University.  
**Image right:** Was the Melsonby Hoard buried by the Brigantes after a grand feast? © Image, Christina Unwin.

# Section Three: Star Objects

The **Star Objects** listed below have been chosen because of what they can tell us about life in **Iron Age Britain**.

Each Star Object comes with:

- A brief **description** of the object, the **materials** used to make it, and why we think it is **important**.
- Suggested **enquiry questions** which you can use to lead a discussion with your pupils.

Each Star Object corresponds to one, or more, **themes** that can be found in the exhibition.

These are:



Feast



Festival



Fight



Funeral

## Children's labels

Every object in the exhibition has its own label. Keep an eye out for our **children's labels**, as these have been written with young people in mind.







## Star Object One: Cauldron

**Materials:** Copper alloy, iron

**Theme:** Feast

### What is it?

- The Brigantes used **cauldrons** to serve food and drink at feasts. When in one piece, this cauldron could have held 79 pints of milk!
- The cauldron was designed to impress. The Brigantes decorated the base with **two fish**. When the cauldron was filled, the fish would have looked like they were **swimming**.
- Iron Age Britons didn't usually eat fish. Rivers may have been **sacred** places, because they sometimes '**buried**' the remains of their loved ones in them.

### Why is it important?

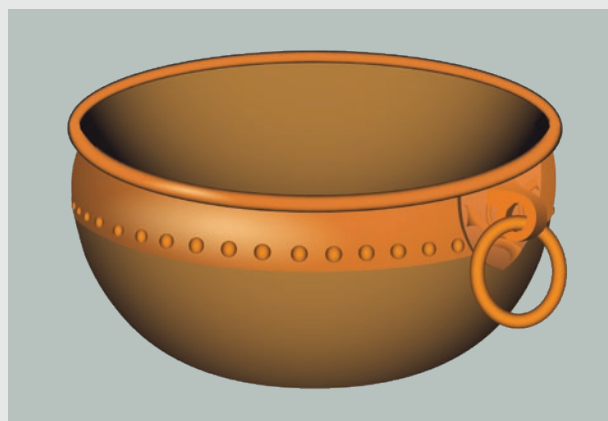
- This cauldron tells us that feasts were important to the Brigantes. Perhaps the Melsonby Hoard was buried after a grand **feast**?

### Enquiry question

- What types of **food** and **drink** do you think the Brigantes served in this cauldron?



**Image:** The cauldron. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).



**Image:** This is what the cauldron may have originally looked like. © Image, Christina Unwin.

### Discover

The bottom of this cauldron was decorated with swimming fish. It may have been used at important feasts.

### Wonder

How would you decorate a fancy cauldron?





## Star Object Two: Wine-mixing bowl



**Materials:** Copper alloy

**Theme:** Feast

### What is it?

- The Brigantes would have used this **wine-mixing bowl** to serve drinks to rich and important people at feasts.
- Wine was a **luxury** drink in the Iron Age as it wasn't made in Britain before the arrival of the Romans. We think that the Brigantes must have bought their wine from **Roman merchants**.

### Why is it important?

- Wine-mixing bowls of this style are normally found in **Italy**. The bowl was also decorated with **coral** from the Mediterranean Sea.
- This may tell us that the Brigantes had **connections** with the **Romans**, even before Emperor Claudius invaded Britain in **AD 43**.

### Enquiry question

- The wine-mixing bowl was also decorated with human **faces**. Can you find one of these on display?



Image: The wine-mixing bowl. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

### Discover

The bowl was used to mix and serve wine at feasts. It was decorated with precious pieces of coral from the Mediterranean.

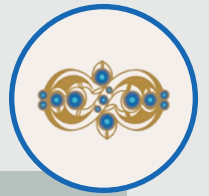
### Wonder

What food or drink would you serve at a feast?



Image: This is what the wine-mixing bowl may have originally looked like. © Image, Christina Unwin.

## Star Object Three: Finals



**Materials:** Bronze

**Theme:** Festival

### What is it?

- These **finials** were used to decorate parts of a **wagon** or **chariot**.
- Powerful people in Iron Age Britain drove wagons and chariots pulled by **ponies**. Chariots were particularly important vehicles that were used in **battles** and **ceremonies**.

### Why is it important?

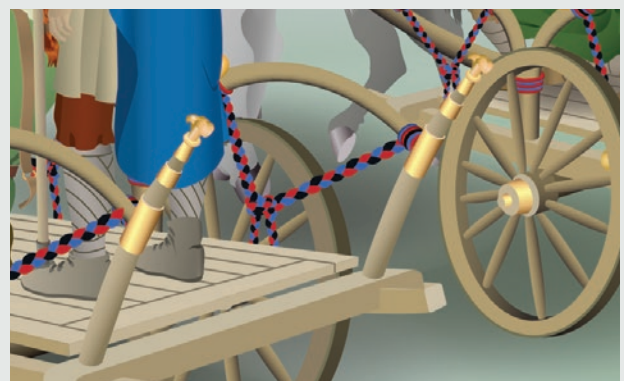
- The Brigantes might have used their decorated wagons and chariots in a **festival** parade. Perhaps the vehicles were **dismantled** and **buried** in the ground as part of the celebration?

### Enquiry question

- Archaeologists have found lots of different **vehicle parts** in the Melsonby Hoard. Can you find any of these on display?

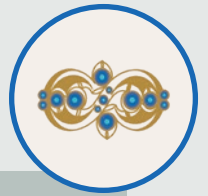


**Image:** The finials. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).



**Image:** We think the finials were used to decorate a wagon or chariot. © Image, Christina Unwin.

## Star Object Four: Horse harness parts



**Materials:** Copper alloy, coral, glass, enamel

**Theme:** Festival

### What is it?

- Hundreds of **horse harness parts** have been found in the Melsonby Hoard. These were used to **decorate** harnesses worn by the ponies which pulled the Brigantes' **wagons** and **chariots**.
- The ponies must have looked impressive in their decorative harnesses. Perhaps they were worn on special occasions, like a **festival**?

### Why is it important?

- Many of the horse harness parts have been decorated with precious materials. These include **coral** from the **Mediterranean Sea** and beads made from **blue glass**.
- Whilst today the coral pieces are white, 2000 years ago they would have been bright **red**.
- These expensive materials show us how **wealthy** the Brigantes were.

### Enquiry question

- What words would you use to **describe** the **shape** of these objects?



**Image:** Horse harness parts. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).



**Image:** The Brigantes attached beautifully decorated objects to their ponies' harnesses. © Image, Christina Unwin.

### Discover

The Brigantes used these beautiful objects to decorate the harnesses of ponies that pulled chariots and wagons.

### Wonder

Can you find an object used to decorate a chariot or wagon?

## Star Object Five: Spearheads



**Materials:** Iron

**Theme:** Fight

### What is it?

- Three **iron spearheads** were discovered in the Melsonby Hoard. Each one would have been attached to a long **pole** to create a fierce **weapon**.
- At almost **60cm** long, these spearheads were probably too large to have been used in a fight. Instead, they may have been designed to **frighten** the Brigantes' enemies and to **impress** their friends.

### Why is it important?

- During the Iron Age, people learned how to make objects from **iron**. It was **easier** and **cheaper** to make weapons and tools from iron than **bronze**.

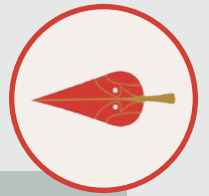
### Enquiry question

- These spearheads were in **good condition** before the Brigantes buried them. Why do you think they chose to bury these weapons?





## Star Object Six: Shield boss



**Materials:** Copper alloy

**Theme:** Fight

### What is it?

- The remains of a **shield** were discovered in the Melsonby Hoard. We think it would have been **oval** in shape, and may have been made from **metal** or **wood**.
- This object is a **shield boss**. It would have sat in the centre of the shield and was designed to **block** attacks or **bash** opponents.

### Why is it important?

- Can you see the **curved lines** on the shield boss? These may tell us that the whole shield was **decorated**. Perhaps this fancy shield was designed to show its owner's **status**?

### Enquiry question

- What do you think the rest of the shield might have **looked** like?

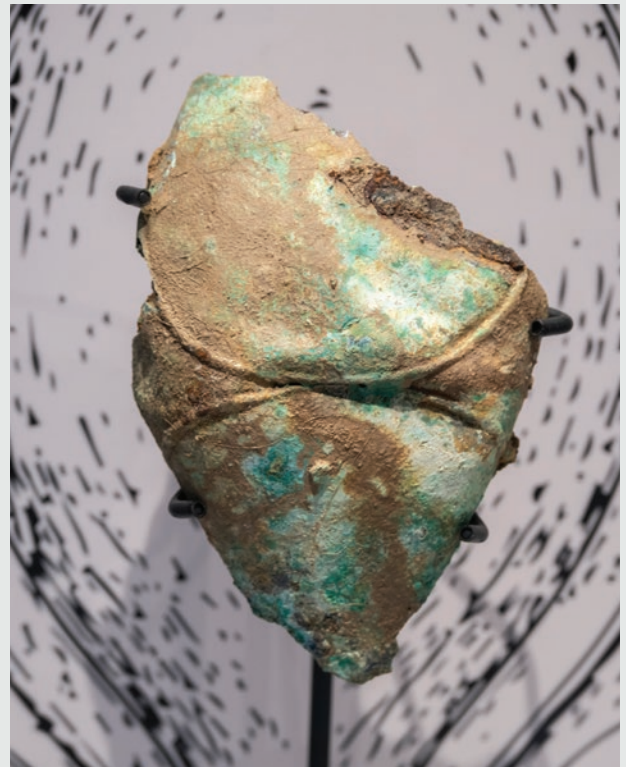


Image: The shield boss. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

### Discover

This piece of metal once sat in the centre of a wooden shield. It was designed to block attacks or bash opponents.

### Wonder

What decorations can you see on this object?

## Star Object Seven: Iron mirror



**Materials:** Iron

**Theme:** Funeral

### What is it?

- This object is an **iron mirror**. Its surface would have been **polished** until it was **smooth** enough for its owner to see their **reflection** in.
- During the Iron Age, mirrors were often **buried** alongside **important women** after they had **died**.

### Why is it important?

- Perhaps the mirror tells us that the Melsonby Hoard was buried as part of the **funeral ceremony** for a queen of the Brigantes?

### Enquiry question

- How might people living in the Iron Age see their **reflections** if they didn't own a mirror?



Image: The iron mirror. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

### Discover

This mirror was made by polishing a piece of iron until it had a smooth surface.

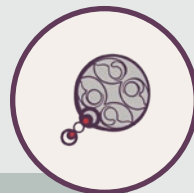
### Wonder

Who do you think would have owned a mirror in the Iron Age?



Image: During the Iron Age, important women were sometimes buried with mirrors. © Image, Christina Unwin.

## Star Object Eight: Blue glass beads



**Materials:** Blue glass

**Theme:** Funeral

### What is it?

- During the Iron Age, **important women** were often buried with pieces of **jewellery** made from **blue glass**.
- Many of the objects in the Melsonby Hoard have been **decorated** with **blue glass beads**. Perhaps this tells us they once belonged to a **powerful woman**?

### Why is it important?

- The Britons bought **glass rods** from the **Mediterranean** to make **blue beads**. This would have been **expensive**, which tells us that the Brigantes were **wealthy**.

### Enquiry question

- Can you find any other objects in the exhibition which have been **decorated** with **blue glass beads**?



**Image:** An object decorated with blue glass beads.  
©York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum)

### Discover

Pieces of jewellery decorated with blue glass were often buried in the graves of important Iron Age women.

### Wonder

What other materials has this object been decorated with?



## Star Object Nine: The Block

**Materials:** Iron, copper alloy

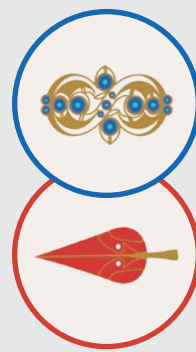
**Theme:** Festival, fight

### What is it?

- When excavating the Melsonby Hoard, archaeologists discovered **88 objects** joined together in a **block**.
- It appears that the Brigantes **threaded** these objects together, wrapped them in **animal skins** or **fabric**, and buried them.
- The objects that can be seen on the block's surface include **spearheads**, as well as **horse harness** and **vehicle parts**.

### Why is it important?

- Archaeologists think that one of the objects **inside** the block is the head of a **Roman javelin**. Could this have been **captured** from some Roman soldiers? Or was it a **gift** to the Brigantes from Roman guests?



### Enquiry question

- What **objects** can you spot on the surface of the block?

### Discover

The Brigantes tangled 88 objects together to create this large block. It was buried, wrapped in animal skins or fabric.

### Wonder

What objects can you see in the block's surface?

