

## The Milton Abbas Pendant

The Museum has the opportunity to acquire this complete gold and rock crystal pendant dating to the 6th or 7th century CE.



Found near Milton Abbas in North Dorset, the pendant is sub-triangular in form and consists of a gold frame which encloses a slightly bi-convex piece of rock crystal. The frame is constructed from gold sheet, with rectangular strips along each upper edge and sub-triangular sheets on front and back with an aperture cut to house the rock crystal. The base was left open, presumably for insertion of the rock crystal, and was then sealed with a separate strip of sheet gold with the other sides of the frame folded over it to hold it in place. At the apex is a separately applied circular suspension loop. The gold frame is decorated with strands of gold beaded wire. On the front face is a framing band on the outer and inner edges, with short lines joining them comprising three lines vertically at the apex, a horizontal pair on each mid-point of the sides, a single strand diagonally at each basal corner and three vertically at the mid-point of the base. The sides and rear face each have a single framing line of beading at the outer edges, and there is a central line of beading across the long access of the basal strip and around the suspension loop.

This is a finely made object, for which no exact parallel could be found by the British Museum specialist. It is of a type unknown in Dorset, and rare elsewhere. The composite construction is unusual, with echoes of manufacturing methods spanning the late Roman and early medieval periods.

## The significance of the Pendant

Objects of this period are very rare in Dorset, which lay to the west of a probable line of contact between the western British kingdoms and people to the east who introduced or adopted more Germanic styles, modes of dress and objects. Composite pendants comprising sheet-gold frames embellished with gold beaded wire are well-known from 6th and 7th century burial contexts in the east of England, whilst a small number of rock-crystal pendants in metal frames are also known. In Dorset a very small number of objects of this date have been seen in graves along the upper Frome Valley suggesting a route of contact up the major rivers. These include the Charminster Grave Group which is already in the Museum's collection. The pendant may well have originated in a funerary context, but its location at least, situated in the upper reaches of the other important central Dorset river, the Piddle, echoes this developing distribution, and also fits with find spots of the very earliest coinage. The object therefore has significance in its own right, but also for what it contributes to what has been a poorly understood period in the county.

## How we will use and display the item

The recently created People's Dorset gallery displays a handful of objects of the same period and it is our ambition to include this object when permanent displays are refreshed. It would sit directly alongside the Charminster Grave group, which also indicates the introduction of high status items into the county, probably via the major rivers and routeways between the 6th and 8th centuries. Rock crystal has been suggested to have connotations of magic or use in scrying and charms; this item also complements a 10th-11th century continental rock crystal brooch which we have recently acquired (having been discovered during an archaeological excavation). These objects together provide us with the opportunity to introduce ideas of belief and superstition.

## The impact this acquisition will have on the museum and our visitors

This object will add to the impact of the displays sitting alongside and enhancing the message of other objects, and providing a more rounded story of the transformation of the county during the post-Roman and early medieval period as it was gradually drawn into the orbit of, and eventually became part of, the Kingdom of Wessex. It provides an example of a personal object, one which may have travelled with its owner, or signified their status, origins or ideas. This offers a sense of personal connection which we attempt to introduce to our visitors.

The acquisition of the Milton Abbas Pendant will complement the early medieval collections at Dorset Museum. This is not a period which has in the past been a priority for collecting but we have recently been able to develop the collection with a selection of important objects. This item is a rare and unusual object and we do not expect to have the opportunity to acquire another. It also has potential for further research with respect to its construction and find spot, which also addresses our commitment to research into the past of the county of Dorset.

To donate to the appeal to secure the Milton Abbas Pendant, please go to <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/21970> or contact [judy.niner@dorsetmuseum.org](mailto:judy.niner@dorsetmuseum.org)

