



making sense of heritage



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**Operation Nightingale** is a ground-breaking military initiative. It utilises archaeology to aid the recovery and skill development of soldiers injured in conflict.

Soldiers are developing new skills and confidence while excavating sites all over the country. Several of these sites are considered to be at risk.

Operation Nightingale teamed up with Wessex Archaeology in 2012 to excavate a Bronze Age burial mound and Saxon cemetery at Barrow Clump, in the Salisbury Plain Training Area.





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# Archaeology in Action

## Barrow Clump



## Bronze Age Barrow

Barrow Clump, on Salisbury Plain, has been a site of human activity for over five thousand years. Originally a Neolithic settlement site, the area has produced flintwork and pottery dating to at least 3500 BC. In the Early Bronze Age (around 2000 BC) this edge of the Avon Valley was chosen as the location for over twenty burial mounds, or barrows. These monuments marked the landscape in remembrance of the dead who were buried there. One of the largest of the barrows was re-used as a cemetery in the Saxon period, between 500 and 600 AD. This barrow is the only mound still visible today, having been protected from ploughing by a clump of trees.

The core of the surviving barrow was originally constructed in the 'Beaker' period (around 2200 BC) and comprised a small mound and ring-ditch. It was later enlarged, creating the distinctive form of a bell barrow. The large central mound was surrounded by a ring-ditch of 45 metres in diameter. The chalk dug by hand from this ditch was used to cap the mound which would have been visible in the landscape from a distance.

Operation Nightingale soldiers excavated a cremation burial that has been dated to the Early Bronze Age by part of an archer's wristguard that was found with the cremated bone.

Although Barrow Clump is protected by its designation as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Operation Nightingale was given special permission to excavate and record the surviving barrow due to the extensive damage being caused by badgers.





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## Barrow Clump Saxon Cemetery

The surviving burial mound at Barrow Clump was re-used as a cemetery in the 6th century AD by Saxons from a local settlement. It is possible that the Saxons recognised the original purpose of the monument as a burial mound, although they may simply have selected the site due to its prominent position in the landscape.

So far, 36 Saxon burials have been excavated. The cemetery contained graves of both men and women, children and adults, with no obvious patterns or divisions between age, sex or social class. Interestingly none of the graves appeared to overlap each other suggesting that they were marked on the surface in some way, perhaps by wooden markers or small mounds of earth.

Men and women in the Saxon period were buried in their clothes and often with prized possessions. At Barrow Clump, several of the male burials were accompanied by items associated with warfare. These included spearheads, shield bosses (the metal centres of wooden shields) and knives. Female burials, on the other hand, contained items of jewellery such as brooches, rings and beads.

The star find of the dig was a rare Saxon bucket – a manly drinking vessel. This bronze-bound tankard has been so well preserved that even the wood has survived.





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## Barrow Clump

### Case Study

One of the Saxon graves at Barrow Clump contained more artefacts than any other. Osteoarchaeologists (bone specialists) have been able to tell us that the person buried in this grave was a young woman in her late teens or early 20s. However, we know very little else about her, such as how she died or why she was buried with so many grave goods. What do you think?

**Beads** - Many brightly coloured glass and amber beads were found in the grave of this woman. It is likely that they were either worn as jewellery or stitched into the fabric of the clothes she was wearing when she was buried.

**Button Brooches** - Anglo-Saxon button brooches were worn singly or in pairs, and usually depicted faces. These two, which retain traces of gilding, were found face-down underneath the waist of the young woman.

**Rings** - Two rings were found on the left hand of the young woman. One is fashioned from a thin strip of bronze the other is a band of silver. Both rings are plain with no evidence of any decoration.

**Cosmetic Brush** - This copper alloy tube is believed to be a cosmetic brush. A bundle of animal hairs would have been held in place at one end and may have been used to apply make-up. The attached ring suggests that the brush was suspended, possibly with other cosmetic items.

**Square-headed Brooch** - This is an unusually small example of a square-headed brooch. These items are often found on the chest or under the chin of females, suggesting that they were used to fasten cloaks or shawls worn over a dress. Traces of preserved fabric survive on the back of this brooch.



Glass Bead



Button Brooches



Cosmetic Brush



Square-headed Brooch



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**Project Florence** is an exciting community engagement initiative.

Run by Wessex Archaeology, the project is working alongside Operation Nightingale at Barrow Clump, making the archaeology accessible to people of all ages and capturing the action through digital media.

Using innovative techniques Project Florence has created opportunities for local people to learn new skills and engage with the heritage on their doorstep.

- 1 On-site activity days
- 2 Volunteering opportunities
- 3 Playing with the Past archaeology club
- 4 The Make a Movie project



Watch the movie here



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