

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

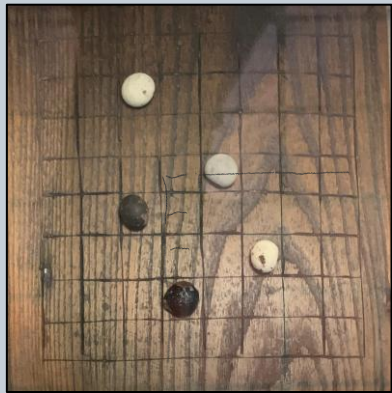
The little museum with the whole world inside

Museum Spotlight: Our Great Hall exhibition. Here, we house our archaeological finds and discoveries from the local area.

Roman Britain:

Our collection of Roman artefacts largely comes from Great Chesterford and Colchester (Camulodunum). Finds are shown from multiple burial sites, as well as a temple.

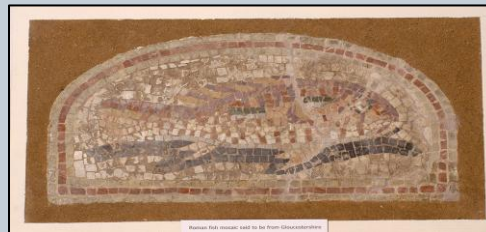
The Romans prided themselves on their 'civilising influence' on occupied territories (the Pax Romana). Certainly, we have evidence that the Romans brought much in the way of leisure, as shown by the cosmetic instruments below.



This board game was known as the 'ludus latruncolorum', or the 'Game of Thieves'. It was similar to draughts, involving taking enemy pieces by 'trapping' them between two of your own.



This shows a nail cleaner (1), a pair of tweezers (2), and a set of spoons for applying ointment (3).



The mosaic here, said to be from Gloucestershire, is of a fish. Food was a common theme for dining-room mosaics.

Anglo-Saxon Britain:

Anglo-Saxon Britain was the period between Roman Britain and the Norman Conquest. Our artefacts are from a range of sites across the county.



These are the skeletons of a man and a woman buried at Coombe. The man is thought to be a nobleman of around 55 years of age at death, and the woman around 35.



The man shows signs of osteoarthritis, and a well-mended break, as shown here, while the woman shows a growth on her lumbar vertebra. Finds like these can show the state of healthcare in the ancient world, as well as diet and work. A skilled physician is likely to have mended this break.



Gold was by far the most common material to construct decorative jewellery from, more popular even than it is today for its ability to never tarnish and ease of working. Rings like this show not only status and wealth, but also as a display of faith – note the cross held by the figure in the left hand.



As Christianity became more and more popular, the burial of jewellery as grave goods became frowned upon, except for nobility and important clergy. Nevertheless, we have many examples of rings and brooches from the time, many found in barrows or other burial sites.

Viking Britain:

Our Viking collection comprises of many artefacts such as coins, combs and jewellery, giving a glimpse into the daily lives of these settlers.



One reason for this is that materials such as amber are found only around the Baltic Sea in any abundance, whereas Scandinavia is much poorer in the gold that can be found throughout Italy and central Europe – thus the Saxon style was influenced by that of the retreated Roman Empire.



Bone combs, also from Ashdon. The Vikings are seen as a warlike people, but they introduced many items like these into common use in the UK – indeed, the word ‘comb’ itself comes from Norse. The Vikings settled throughout Britain and spent a large amount of time at peace.



The Vikings still well deserved their reputation as warriors, though; see above, ancient, rusted blades of a sword and dagger. The dagger had use as a tool, for hunting and for cutting leather and foods, but a sword is a weapon of war.



Pennies minted during the reign of King Alfred the Great, found as part of an Ashdon hoard

The Vikings made their jewellery out of a typically much wider range of materials than the Saxons. While silver and gold still featured a lot, other materials such as iron, resin and amber can be found in Viking jewellery in abundance.

The Norman Conquest:



The Benedictine monks are the oldest order of the Latin church, and most of the abbeys and priories built by the Normans housed them.

Saffron Walden was an important town in Norman England. Walden Abbey, the local Benedictine priory, was founded by Earl of Essex Geoffrey de Mandeville II, who also built Saffron Walden Castle – still able to be visited in the museum grounds.

This carving from Barnwell Priory shows the Archangel Michael. While the Saxons were religious, and the Vikings converted to Christianity too, Norman Britain started a new age of respect and power for the Church. Abbeys and priories were built across the country as a means of displaying power and controlling the newly-conquered peoples of England.



We have the most complete records from Norman times compared to the other ages discussed here – partly because they are most recent and partly because English rule was more organised and complex. Legal records give snapshots of ordinary life. The Domesday Book shown here demonstrates how land was redistributed to build William the Conqueror a strong power base for his supporters, whilst not angering the established Saxon nobles.



The Normans were master castle-builders, with a distinctive motte-and-bailey design – a keep protected by an earthworks, within a wall, ditch and palisade – able to, in some cases, construct a wooden fort in less than a week! Saffron Walden castle is an example of this – it itself was never attacked, the occupant was always lured out of the castle and fought against in the open.