

Internationally important Bronze Age dagger saved for the nation Rare antiquity used as a doorstep to go on display in Norwich

23 November 2014

A rare Middle Bronze Age weapon, one of only six known from Europe, has been saved for the nation with a grant of almost £39,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF).

Image



Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery

The Rudham Dirk

Image



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The Rudham Dirk

The award, made to Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, has allowed the Rudham Dirk, a ceremonial dagger, to come into public ownership to be placed on display for visitors to enjoy.

The Dirk was discovered twelve years ago, when it was ploughed up in a field in East Rudham, north Norfolk. Its significance unknown at that time, it was subsequently used as a doorstep until it was identified in 2013.

It is incredibly rare and only six examples of this type of dirk are known in Europe: two from France, two from Holland and now two from Britain. Intriguingly, the British parallel was also found in Norfolk, at Oxborough in 1988, and is now in the British Museum.

What makes the Rudham Dirk particularly distinctive is its monumental size. At approximately 68cms long it is about three times the size of a normal Bronze Age dirk and so large and heavy it is completely impractical as a weapon.

With a blunt blade that was never sharpened and no rivet holes for a handle, the Dirk was deliberately designed as a ceremonial weapon. This is almost certainly

the reason why it was found bent in half, deliberately folded as part of the object's ritual 'destruction' before its burial, a practice well known from Bronze Age metalwork.

Dr Tim Pestell, Senior Curator of Archaeology at Norwich Castle said: "We are delighted to have secured such an important and rare find as this, which provides us with insights into the beliefs and contacts of people at the dawn of metalworking. Through its display we hope to bring residents and visitors to Norfolk closer to the remarkable archaeology of our region and stories of our ancient past."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of NHMF, said: "This is great news! The Rudham Dirk is a fascinating piece of our heritage that offers real insight into how our Bronze Age ancestors lived. Our trustees felt it vital that it be secured for the nation and remain in Norfolk where local people can enjoy it and explore its connection to the area."

Notes to editors

After some years as a doorstep, the dirk was reviewed by Norfolk's Identification and Recording Service, which runs the county's Portable Antiquities Scheme where it was dated and identified as an artefact of incredible importance. Negotiations were subsequently opened between the landowner and Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery and a final sale price of £40,970 agreed. Grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society have enabled the dirk to be secured for the nation.

Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, which traces its origins back to 1824, is the principal museum in Norfolk and tells the story of the county and its place in the world with collections of Archaeology, Fine Art, Decorative Art and Natural History, all of which have been Designated as of outstanding importance. Its archaeology collections are particularly fine and comprehensive. They include the famous Happisburgh Handaxe, the oldest handaxe in northern Europe, Iron Age gold torcs from Snettisham and the gold seal of Balthild, probably the Merovingian queen and saint of that name who lived c.626-80. Further information is available on the [Norfolk Museums website](#).

Further information

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