



# The Clevedon Torc

The Clevedon Torc is on loan to Weston Museum from the British Museum for three years. It is an important piece of gold Iron Age jewellery, dating from between 150 BC – 50 BC.

As its name suggests the torc was found in Clevedon, about 11 miles north of Weston-super-Mare. It was unearthed near Walton Castle, which was built on the site of an Iron Age hillfort in the 1700s. No records exist as to who found the torc, nor the exact date and location of the find. All we know is that it was discovered sometime before 1897.



*A Torc discovered in Ipswich © The British Museum*

The torc was due to be melted down by Parson & Son of Bristol, a firm of metalsmiths. It was saved by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, a leading collector of ancient objects, or antiquities, during the later 1800s. Franks bought the torc for his own collection, and later presented it to the British Museum.

A torc (also spelled torq or torque) is a large rigid neck-ring made from metal. The metal can be a single piece, or multiple strands of wire twisted together. The ends of a torc were usually finished with pieces known as terminals, which were often highly decorated. The terminals were mostly cast separately and then fused onto the neck-ring.

Most torcs are open at the front. Some had hook and ring closures, and a few had locking catches. Many seem designed for near-permanent wear, and would have been difficult to remove.

Torc are found in many Iron Age cultures. The gold torc was an important object for the Celtic peoples of the era, and only those of high status would wear one. Some of the finest works of ancient Celtic art discovered in the UK are torcs. The gold torcs found at Leekfrith in Staffordshire are thought to be the oldest examples of Iron Age jewellery found in Britain.



*Snettisham Great Torc © The British Museum*

Other important discoveries have been made near Stirling in Scotland; at Snettisham in Norfolk; and at Ipswich in Suffolk. Torcs have also been found in Portugal, Spain, Italy, and as far away as Iran. Most of the discoveries have been made from gold, silver or bronze, as these metals survive best when buried for long periods of time.

## Our Torc

The torc on display here consists of a hollow terminal and part of a neck-ring made from twisted strands of gold wire. The terminal is made from gold alloy, a blend of gold and at least one more metal such as silver or copper. The flat-ended terminal is of a type known as a “buffer”. It is decorated on the face and sides with a pattern of scrolls and stylised leaves. The base has lines of finely punched dots running around it. The terminal would probably have been soldered onto the neck-ring.



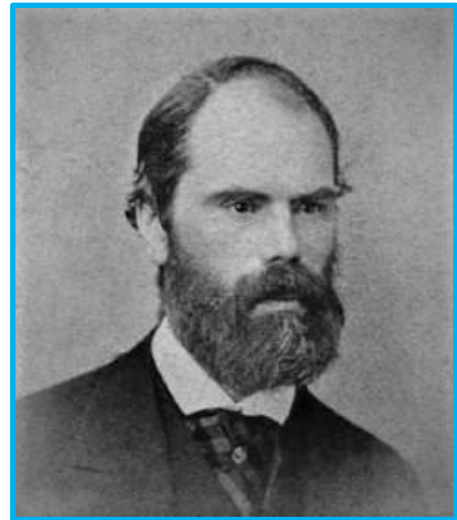
*A closer view of the Torc's Neck Ring (top) and Terminal*  
© The British Museum

The terminal is approximately 3.5 cm across, and approximately 3 cm high. The thickness of the gold alloy varies between approximately 1 and 2 cm. The neck-ring fragment is approximately 13 cm long.

Iron Age Britain is often viewed as a fairly primitive society, particularly when compared to ancient Greece or Rome. Beautifully crafted objects such as the Clevedon Torc prove that ancient Britons had a culture of their own.

## Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks (1826 – 1897)

Franks was born in Geneva, and spent his early years in Switzerland and Italy. He returned to England to be educated at Eton College and then Cambridge University. Franks joined the British Museum's Department of Antiquities in 1851, where he worked for 45 years.



*Augustus Wollaston Franks*

He added many fine items to the museum collections, as well as publishing catalogues, guides and academic papers.

Franks has been described as “arguably the most important collector in the history of the British Museum, and one of the greatest collectors of his age”. He was knighted in 1894. Franks retired from the British Museum in 1896, and died in 1897.

He was a wealthy man, and built up his own huge collection of antiquities. Most of these objects were donated to the British Museum, either during his lifetime or after his death. His gifts included the Clevedon Torc.



Weston-super-Mare  
Town Council