# New research reveals Iron Age Britain mafia-style gang warfare predates Roman conquest



Recent research has uncovered a grim reality underlying life in Iron Age Britain, revealing that mafia-like gangs engaged in brutal turf wars rather than being solely victims of Roman conquest. For decades, historians attributed the mass slaughters of natives at hill forts, particularly at Maiden Castle in Dorset, to invading Roman forces. However, new radiocarbon dating of human remains from this significant archaeological site has established that these brutalities occurred a full century before the Romans' arrival in Britain.

The investigation into the burial site at Maiden Castle, led by Dr Miles Russell of Bournemouth University, offers a more nuanced picture of Iron Age conflict. The analysis indicates that the victims were likely executed in public acts designed to intimidate rival tribes. According to Dr Russell, “We can now say quite categorically that these individuals died a long time before the Romans arrived and over a long period of time, not in single battle for a hill fort." The skeletal remains, showing evidence of lethal weapon injuries, suggest that these violent incidents were not merely isolated conflicts but part of a series of gangland-style executions aimed at establishing control.

Maiden Castle, one of the largest hill forts in Britain, has long been a focal point for understanding Iron Age society. First built around 600 BC and expanded around 450 BC, it served as a vital settlement for the Durotriges tribe. Previous theories, posited by early excavators like Sir Mortimer Wheeler, claimed that the site was the scene of a desperate defence against Roman legions. This narrative has been propagated through numerous historical accounts and popular culture, painting a picture of noble Britons resisting foreign invaders. Yet, Dr Russell's findings challenge these established interpretations, suggesting instead that it was fellow Britons engaging in violent power struggles for control over trade routes and territorial dominance.

This revelation invites further examination of other archaeological sites in the region. Recent excavations at various hill forts across Britain, including a site in Derbyshire, have unearthed evidence of massacres, including the remains of vulnerable populations like women and children. These discoveries indicate a pattern of violence and social tumult within Iron Age communities, countering the conventional view that sees such conflicts primarily as confrontations with an external enemy. As noted by archaeologists, the evidence from these sites depicts hill forts not merely as defensive structures but as emblematic of the internal strife that characterised pre-Roman societies.

Moreover, the ongoing research highlights the complexities of Iron Age society, suggesting that it was shaped by intricate social dynamics, including power struggles that may have even incorporated ritualistic elements. Some recent studies propose that certain violent acts might have had a community-sanctioned aspect, contributing a further layer of understanding to the motivations behind such brutality.

Dr Russell's work notably calls into question some foundational narratives in British history. The portrayal of the Romans as the primary agents of destruction in Iron Age Britain has long been entrenched in the cultural consciousness. By shifting the focus to the internal conflicts among indigenous tribes, scholars are beginning to rewrite the story of this tumultuous period, showcasing the bloodshed as a product of local rivalries rather than merely foreign aggression.

The findings from Maiden Castle, alongside similar discoveries elsewhere, provide a vital re-examination of Britain's Iron Age, encouraging historians and archaeologists alike to delve deeper into the human stories behind ancient burial sites. As our understanding evolves, it becomes increasingly clear that the legacy of Iron Age Britain is as much about the internal battles of its tribes as it is about the external threats they faced.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14750151/The-mafia-like-turf-wars-Iron-Age-Britain-Game-Thrones-style-barons-carried-gangland-executions-rival-tribes-leading-mass-slaughter-new-research-reveals.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maiden_Castle%2C_Dorset)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14750151/The-mafia-like-turf-wars-Iron-Age-Britain-Game-Thrones-style-barons-carried-gangland-executions-rival-tribes-leading-mass-slaughter-new-research-reveals.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.archaeology.org/news/1020-220101-iron-age-massacre)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13082240), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/oct/15/ritual-murder-iron-age-britain)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://wildhunt.org/2024/10/new-research-points-to-ritual-murder-practices-in-the-british-iron-age.html), [[5]](https://www.archaeology.org/news/1020-220101-iron-age-massacre)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14750151/The-mafia-like-turf-wars-Iron-Age-Britain-Game-Thrones-style-barons-carried-gangland-executions-rival-tribes-leading-mass-slaughter-new-research-reveals.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maiden\_Castle,\_Dorset](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maiden_Castle%2C_Dorset) - Maiden Castle is an Iron Age hill fort located southwest of Dorchester in Dorset, England. Constructed around 600 BC, it was expanded around 450 BC to become the largest hill fort in Britain and one of the largest in Europe. The site was occupied until at least the Roman period, by which time it was in the territory of the Durotriges, a Celtic tribe. Excavations have revealed evidence of habitation, iron production, and a significant cemetery containing burials of individuals who died in violent circumstances, including one with a Roman catapult bolt in its back. These findings suggest that the hill fort experienced significant conflict during its occupation. ([en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maiden_Castle%2C_Dorset?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13082240> - Archaeologists have discovered evidence of a massacre linked to Iron Age warfare at a hill fort in Derbyshire. A burial site contained only women and children—the first segregated burial of this kind from Iron Age Britain. Nine skeletons were found in a section of ditch around the fort at Fin Cop in the Peak District. Scientists believe 'perhaps hundreds more skeletons' could be buried in the ditch, only a small part of which has been excavated so far. The findings provide a rare insight into warfare in pre-Roman Britain, indicating that hill forts functioned as displays of power and were constructed in response to real threats. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13082240?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://wildhunt.org/2024/10/new-research-points-to-ritual-murder-practices-in-the-british-iron-age.html> - Recent research has uncovered evidence of ritual murder practices in the British Iron Age. The study focuses on a burial site where the remains of a woman, along with other individuals, were found. The findings suggest that such practices were community-sanctioned events, providing a glimpse into the social and ritualistic aspects of Iron Age society. The research highlights the importance of understanding the human stories behind ancient burials to gain a comprehensive view of past societies. ([wildhunt.org](https://wildhunt.org/2024/10/new-research-points-to-ritual-murder-practices-in-the-british-iron-age.html?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.archaeology.org/news/1020-220101-iron-age-massacre> - Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of a massacre at an Iron Age hill fort in Derbyshire, England. The discovery includes the remains of women and children, suggesting that the fort was attacked and its inhabitants killed. This finding provides rare insight into the nature of warfare and social dynamics in pre-Roman Britain, indicating that hill forts were not only defensive structures but also sites of significant violence and conflict. The study sheds light on the complexities of Iron Age society and its interactions with neighbouring communities. ([bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-13082240?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/oct/15/ritual-murder-iron-age-britain> - New research has revealed evidence of ritual murder practices in Iron Age Britain. The study focuses on a burial site where the remains of a woman, along with other individuals, were found. The findings suggest that such practices were community-sanctioned events, providing a glimpse into the social and ritualistic aspects of Iron Age society. The research highlights the importance of understanding the human stories behind ancient burials to gain a comprehensive view of past societies. ([wildhunt.org](https://wildhunt.org/2024/10/new-research-points-to-ritual-murder-practices-in-the-british-iron-age.html?utm_source=openai))
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