# Game of Thrones-like massacre uncovered at Maiden Castle predates Roman invasion



In a remarkable revelation that echoes the ruthless power struggles depicted in programmes like *Game of Thrones*, recent research has shed light on a brutal massacre that occurred around 2,000 years ago at Maiden Castle in Dorset, England. The skeletal remains of at least 62 individuals, unearthed in 1936, were long thought to be victims of the Roman invasion. However, advancements in archaeological dating techniques have prompted experts to reevaluate this interpretation, suggesting instead a violent internal conflict among local elites.

Dr Miles Russell, an archaeologist from Bournemouth University, has asserted that the remains date back to the first century AD, well before the commonly cited Roman invasion in AD 43. He articulated the brutal nature of the deaths, stating, “They died violently and with overkill. These were Game of Thrones-like barons with one dynasty wiping out another.” The analysis indicated that the victims suffered catastrophic trauma, with many skulls severely damaged, likely from swords and other weapons. This form of violence in the burials was typically reserved for high-status individuals, suggesting these were not random victims but aristocrats related by blood and power.

In contrast to the earlier interpretations by Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who directed the excavations and posited a narrative of barbaric Roman aggression, Dr Russell contends that this view, while compelling, overlooked crucial details. It was thought that the burials represented a retaliatory massacre during the tumultuous Roman campaign. However, modern evaluations indicate that the hill fort remained occupied during the Roman conquest, complicating any direct ties between Roman forces and the violent deaths at Maiden Castle. The site continued to be significant long after the purported massacre, and its role evolved with many public burials speaking to the honour of those interred rather than the disgrace typically associated with criminal executions.

The scale and design of Maiden Castle itself augment its historical significance. Covering an area comparable to 50 football pitches, it stands as one of the largest Iron Age hill forts in Europe. Built approximately 2,400 years ago, its imposing ramparts were designed to protect several hundred inhabitants and to signify power. As the Romans later expanded their influence in Britain, they established Dorchester nearby, reinforcing their position in the region. This transition underscores how territorial dominance shifted from indigenous lords to Roman rule, culminating in the eventual abandonment of Maiden Castle shortly thereafter.

In summation, the research at Maiden Castle illustrates not only a pivotal slice of British history but also the complexities of power and violence that echo through time. With modern techniques unveiling a narrative of internal conflict rather than mere colonial aggression, the site continues to be a focal point for understanding the socio-political landscape of Iron Age Britain and the significant transformations that followed the Roman conquest.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/dorset-maiden-castle-massacre-game-of-thrones-roman-invasion-b2759769.html), [[2]](https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/maiden-castle/history/roman-invasion)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/dorset-maiden-castle-massacre-game-of-thrones-roman-invasion-b2759769.html), [[3]](https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/maiden-castle/history/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maiden_Castle,_Dorset), [[5]](https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/maiden-castle), [[6]](https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1015775)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/maiden-castle/history/roman-invasion), [[7]](https://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/ancient-sites/maiden-castle/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/archaeology/dorset-maiden-castle-massacre-game-of-thrones-roman-invasion-b2759769.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/maiden-castle/history/roman-invasion> - This article from English Heritage discusses the Roman invasion of Maiden Castle, Dorset. It highlights Sir Mortimer Wheeler's 1930s excavations, which uncovered a 'war cemetery' with skeletons exhibiting signs of violent death. Wheeler interpreted these findings as evidence of a Roman attack in AD 43. However, subsequent research suggests that the site was occupied during the Roman conquest, and the burials may not be directly linked to Roman aggression. The article also notes that the hill fort was abandoned shortly after the Roman invasion, with the Romans establishing the town of Dorchester nearby.
3. <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/maiden-castle/history/> - This page provides an overview of Maiden Castle's history, detailing its development from a Neolithic enclosure over 6,000 years ago to its status as one of the largest Iron Age hill forts in Britain. It covers the 1930s excavations by Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Tessa Verney Wheeler, which revealed a late Iron Age cemetery with over 52 burials. The article also discusses the site's abandonment after the Roman conquest and the construction of a Romano-British temple in the 4th century AD.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maiden_Castle,_Dorset> - This Wikipedia article offers a comprehensive history of Maiden Castle, Dorset. It details the site's expansion around 450 BC, making it the largest hill fort in Britain and Europe. The article discusses the decline of habitation around 100 BC, the Roman conquest in AD 43, and the subsequent abandonment of the hill fort. It also covers the construction of a Roman temple in the 4th century AD and the site's eventual abandonment in the 6th century AD.
5. <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/maiden-castle> - This page from English Heritage provides information about visiting Maiden Castle, Dorset. It describes the site as one of the largest and most complex Iron Age hill forts in Europe, covering an area the size of 50 football pitches. The page includes details on the site's history, including Neolithic and Roman periods, and offers practical information for visitors, such as access, parking, and facilities.
6. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1015775> - This listing from Historic England provides detailed information about Maiden Castle, Dorset. It describes the site's multi-period remains on a chalk hilltop, overlooking the valleys of the rivers Frome and South Winterborne. The listing includes details about the site's excavation history, including work by Edward Cunnington in 1884 and Sir Mortimer Wheeler between 1934 and 1937, as well as additional investigations conducted during 1985-6.
7. <https://www.mysteriousbritain.co.uk/ancient-sites/maiden-castle/> - This article from Mysterious Britain & Ireland discusses the history and archaeology of Maiden Castle, Dorset. It covers the late Iron Age community's fortification during the Roman invasion, the Roman attack in AD 43-44, and the discovery of a skeleton with an iron ballista head embedded in its spine. The article also mentions the construction of a Roman temple within the hill fort during the later half of Roman occupation and the site's abandonment after the Roman withdrawal.