

Culture Skills of Ancient Britons



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Roman Britons Strolling by the Thames

STRANGE AS IT MAY SEEM, it was the enemies of ancient Britain who wrote at length with candour the most faithful description of the early Britons, showing that they possessed an admirable culture, a patriarchal religion, and an epochal history that extended far beyond that of Rome. Modern writers also confirm their testimony.

E. O. Gordon, in *Prehistoric London*, states that the city of London (Llandn) was founded two hundred and seventy years before Rome, in 1020 B.C.

The famed British archaeologist, Sir Flinders Petrie, discovered at Old Gaza gold ornaments and enamelware of Celtic origin, dated 1500 B.C., and in reverse found Egyptian beads at Stonehenge.

The art of enamelling is early identified with Britain as is the production of tin. The ancient Briton was the inventor of enamelling. He was so perfect in this craft that relics reposing in the British Museum and the Glastonbury Museum, such as the famous Glastonbury bowl (over two thousand years old), and the beautiful Desborough mirror are as perfect as the day they were made. They are magnificent examples of "La Tene" art, as the Celtic design is named, their geometric beauty and excellence being beyond the ability 'of modern craftsmen to duplicate.

In *Early Britain*, by Jacquetta Hawkes, we read: "These Yorkshire Celts, beyond all other groups seem to have been responsible for establishing the tradition of La Tene art. . . .

Nearly all the finest pieces are luxuries reflecting the taste of warriors who enjoyed personal magnificence and the trapping out of their wives and horses. Brooches to fasten the Celtic cloak, bracelets, necklaces, pins, hand mirrors, harness fittings: bits and horse armour, helmets, sword scabbards and shields were among the chief vehicles of La Tene art.

They show on the one hand strong plastic modelling, and on the other decorative design incised, in low relief, or picked out in coloured enamel. Both plastically and in the flat the Celtic work shows an extraordinary assurance, often a kind of wild delicacy, far surpassing its Greek prototypes.

In these the finest artists achieved a marvellous control of balanced symmetry in the design and equally in its related spaces."

S. E. Winbold, in *Britain B.C.* writes: "The Celtic curvilinear art, circa 300 B.C. and of which the famous Glastonbury bowl is a good example, reached its zenith development in Britain."

Roman testimony states that captive Britons taught the Romans the craft of enamelling.

Herodotus, father of *profane history circa 450 B.C.*, wrote of the British Isles and its people, under the name of Cassiterides, remarking on their

talent in the metal industry. Julius Caesar, following his campaign in Britain, 55 B.C., wrote with admiration of their culture, their sterling character, ingenuity in commerce, and craftsmanship.

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