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## Burials of martial character in the British Iron Age

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### Abstract

The significance of the decision to bury an individual with martial objects during the British Iron Age cannot be overstated. It is a rare subset of funerary practice, conferred upon select individuals. This article examines martial burials, firstly summarising past research, then presenting an overview of martial object classes, and their treatments in funerary practice. There is a particular focus on the Arras Culture of East Yorkshire, which dominates the data due to the highly unusual, almost unique, ritual in which spears appear to have been thrown at the corpse as part of the funeral. The analysis presented here highlights the importance of non-offensive martial objects, and demonstrates that there is much greater diversity in Iron Age martial burial practice than previously recognised.

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“The Iron Age site at Childrey Warren was particularly fascinating, as it provided a glimpse into the beliefs and superstitions of people living in Oxfordshire before the Roman conquest,” said Neil Holbrook, chief executive of Cotswold Archaeology, in a statement. He also added that previous research has uncovered similar pit burials that suggest that Britain’s ancient population may have practiced human sacrifice. Ancient Britons had interesting relationships with their dead, and not just involving burials. In a 2016 study published in the Journal of Archaeological Science, for example, researchers found that some Iron Age Britons were buried in large grain storage pits, only to be exhumed years later. The process was done to retrieve a body part, as a relic of the deceased. Early in the Iron Age, the widespread Wessex pottery of southern Great Britain such as the type style from All Cannings Cross may suggest a consolidated socio-economic group in the region. However, by 600 BC this appears to have broken down into differing sub-groups with their own pottery styles. Archaeological evidence. Cremation was a method of disposing of the dead although the chariot burials and other inhumations of the Arras culture of East Yorkshire, and the cist burials of Cornwall, demonstrate that it was not ubiquitous. In fact, the general dearth of excavated Iron Age burials makes drawing conclusions difficult. The British Iron Age is a conventional name used in the archaeology of Great Britain, referring to the prehistoric and protohistoric phases of the Iron Age culture of the main island and the smaller islands, typically excluding prehistoric Ireland, which had an independent Iron Age culture of its own. The parallel phase of Irish archaeology is termed the Irish Iron Age. The Iron Age is not an archaeological horizon of common artefacts, but is rather a locally diverse cultural phase.