



Video transcript

A tour of Maiden Castle

A very long time ago, in ancient Britain, there were no written words. This was the time before history was recorded - it's prehistory.

The only clues to life back then come from the objects, burials, cave paintings and monuments which speak to us about Britain's ancient past. My name is Raksha Dave. I'm an archaeologist and I'm in search of Britain's Ancient Voices.

This may look like an odd-shaped hill. But in fact it's what's left of an Iron Age hill fort built 2,500 years ago.

This is Maiden Castle. At this time people in Britain lived in tribes. But as land began to be used up, tribe started to fight each other. So some, built hill forts to defend their territories.

This is the largest hill fort of them all. In fact, it's as big as 50 football pitches. It's incredibly steep so must have been really difficult to attack. This is hard work, and once you think you've got to the top there's another ridge to get over.

Maiden Castle isn't built from stone, but carved from the hill. To make the hill fort hard to enter, banks were built all around it. These banks, known as ramparts, are built out of chalk dug from the ditches down here, which were much deeper in the Iron Age.

And of course there were no mechanical diggers back then, so digging this by hand was hard, physical work. The ramparts would have been a brilliant, chalky white and visible from a long way away.

Finally I have reached the top and up here is where the tribe would have lived. Here at the hill fort's entrance you'd have a bird's eye view of who was arriving and if any enemies were spotted they would be lobbed with stones kept in large pits here.

And we know this because 20,000 of them, like these, were found at the eastern entrance just for that purpose. And they could be deadly.

The tribe must have felt very protected living here on top of the hill fort.

Just imagine the roundhouses here in neat little rows, with sheep outside bleating in their pens, children practising with their slingshots, their parents warning them to be careful, people sharing stories and food around the campfire, tribal elders calling them for a meeting.

Maiden Castle was also a safe place to buy and sell crops, pots, weapons and jewellery. And to pay for these goods they used grain, which they kept in special pits on top of the hill fort.

They used metal ring money, too. These are actual Iron Age coins, about 2,500 years old.

They looked very different from the flat coins that we use today. The bigger the ring, the more it weighed, and the greater the value of the coin.

It's amazing to think that on top of this hill, inside these walls, this was a place teeming with life.

Where people were busy going about their daily activities, working, trading, and meeting people, and keeping an eye on the crops and animals in the fields below Maiden Castle.

No wonder it's called "mai-dun", the Iron Age words for "great fort".