TOP TREASURE

Find this at

Carisbrooke Castle Museum

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Questions

- What do you think it is?
- Can you describe it?
- What do you think it is made from?
- How big do you think it is?
- What is it made from?
- What do you think it was used for?

FACT FILE

Game counter

What is it?

This is a very finely carved counter, or tableman from a game called tables. Tables was a game that mixed luck and skill. Two players competed to get their fifteen men across the board first whilst blocking the moves of their opponent.

The board was like a modern backgammon board and was known as a pair of tables. Players rolled dice, moving men along the board according to throws of the dice. It was a good way to improve your problem solving skills.

The carving shows a Norman knight standing on a drawbridge outside a castle. He is wearing a mail coat and a helmet. What might have been in his right hand?

Basic facts

Diameter: 7.1cm depth: 1.4 cm

How old is it?

1130-40 AD.

It is early 900 years old!

Significance

Tables was popular with nobility. The person that played with this set must have been very wealthy as the piece is finely carved.

About 200 of these counters survive and one complete set was found in Gloucester in 1983.

What is it made from?

Walrus ivory.

Other facts

It was found down a well on the Isle of Wight in 1732.

The border of the piece is raised so that the picture in the middle did not get damaged when it was stacked. Single pieces were vulnerable to capture, but if pieces were stacked it stopped an opponent from occupying the position.

Because the picture shows the gates coming off the sides of the castle it has been suggested that it represents the bible story of Samson tearing down the gates of the city of Gaza.

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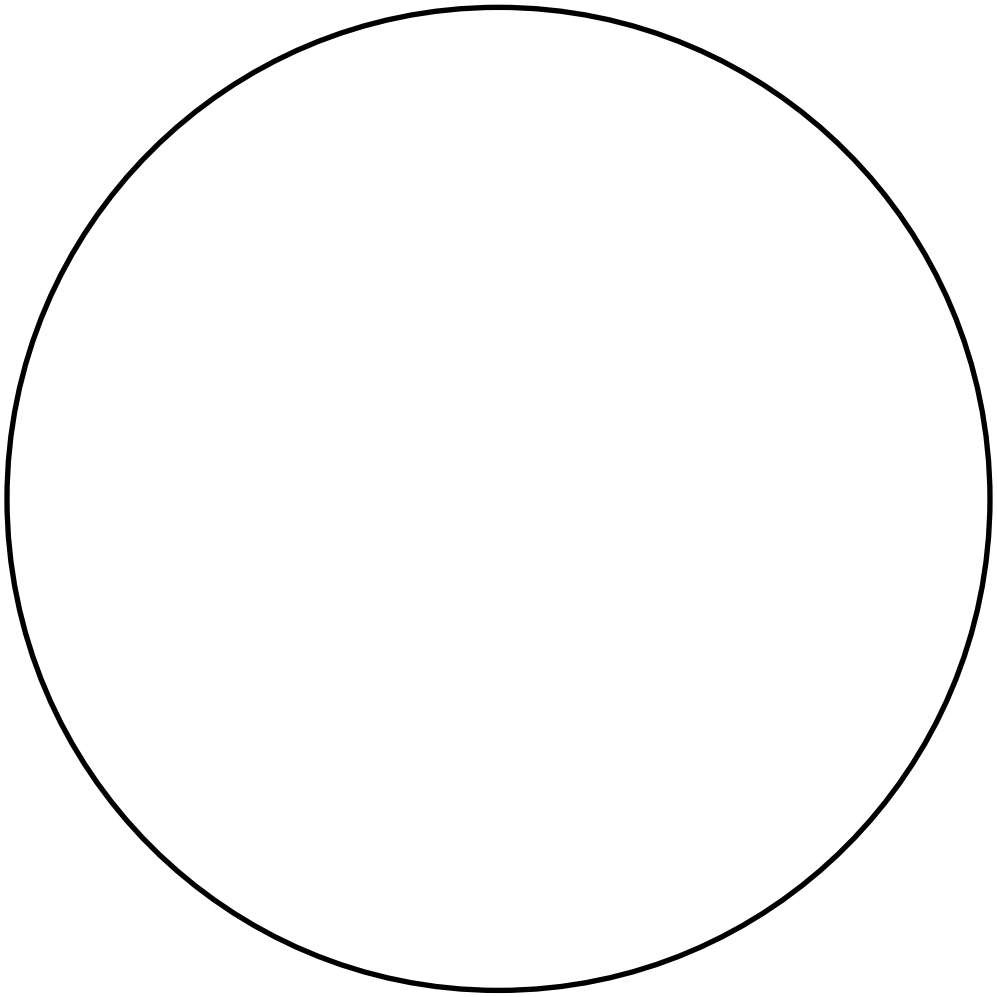
Why don't you?

- Find out more about the tableman by searching online for: "teaching history game counter".
- The illustration at tiny.cc/tables-game shows the game in action. Research how backgammon is played. If you don't have a set at home research the rules, make your own board and play a game of it.
- Watch tiny.cc/bbc-castles to find out more about what was happening at Carisbrooke Castle in 1136, around the time the tableman was made. Create a cartoon strip to tell the story.
- The counter was made in the Norman period. Watch tiny.cc/wicked-william and create a fact file about the Normans.
- Search online for: "bigger picture medieval counter". Learn about other board games from the past. Use this to inspire you to create your own board game to play.
- Look at more examples of tableman, for example: tiny.cc/1130-tableman and tiny.cc/1150-tableman. Design your own piece and draw it in the box below.



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