

## Timeline – Stone Age to Iron Age

# Stone Age to Iron Age – overview and depth

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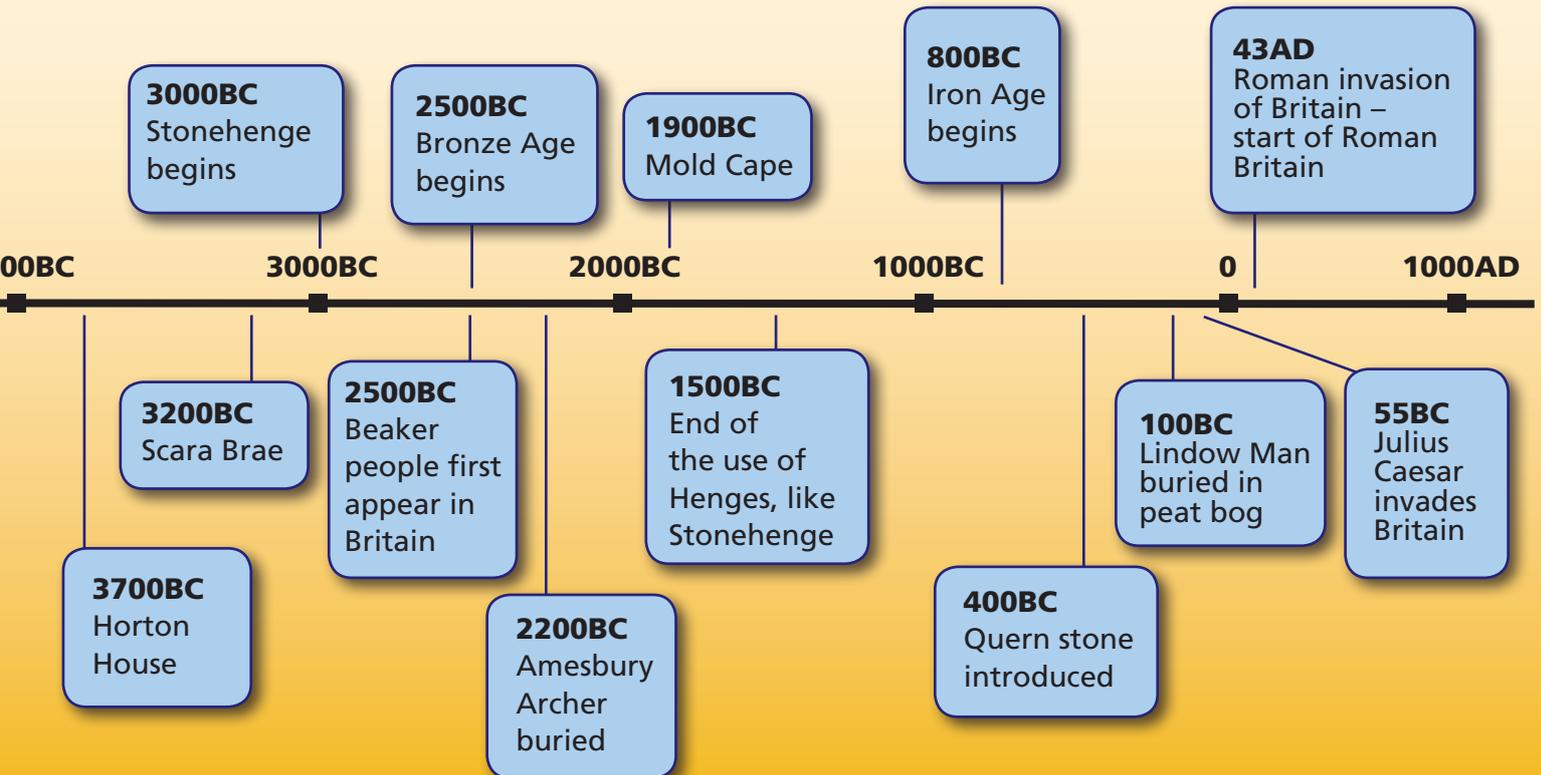
### Introduction

Stone Age to Iron Age covers around 10,000 years, between the last Ice Age and the coming of the Romans. Such a long period is difficult for children to imagine, but putting the children into a living time-line across the classroom might help. In one sense not a lot happens for a very long time, yet in another sense dramatic changes occur at irregular periods. Man moves from hunter-gatherer to farmer, from rural to urban, from fighting for survival to sophisticated society. There is plenty to get your teeth into! This feature should help you plan.

### English prehistory, from the Stone Age to the Iron Age

History would have been impossible without prehistory. Prehistory is far more than a mere preamble to the main show. It was during prehistory that Britain acquired its languages, landscape and regional identities. In the following few paragraphs I would like to give an impression of the subject's extraordinary scope and diversity. I would have thought that the best way to catch the imaginations of young children would be through discussion of the practical side of life: how tools changed through time; how buildings were

constructed; how villages operated; how inland and maritime transport developed; how people defended themselves. It would also be good to consider why prehistoric people regarded time as cyclical, rather than continuous, as we do today. It would be interesting to examine pre-Roman farm animals, through examples that still exist today (Soay sheep; Tamworth pigs, Dexter Cattle and Dartmoor ponies). Prehistoric domestic skills are a good way to link modern children to the sources of such basic things as their food and clothes; good examples include spinning (with a spindle whorl), weaving (with and without a loom) and grinding corn with a quern (or pestle and mortar) to produce flour.



The story begins around a million years ago on what is now the beach of the Norfolk coastal town of Happisburgh. This site has revealed Britain's earliest flint tools which were used by ancestors of modern humans at a time when the British Isles were still joined to the mainland of Europe. As the Ice Ages progressed people came and went, depending on the climate of the time, but during these hundreds of thousands of years it is possible to trace the steady progress and technological development of these communities, which latterly were capable of fine carving and artwork.

The climate warmed very rapidly around 9600 BC and this marks the start of post-glacial prehistory and the arrival of a new set of communities labelled Mesolithic, or Middle Stone Age. It used to be believed that these communities were very small and lived a shifting nomadic lifestyle, but over the past ten years new research has shown that small permanent villages were in existence, complete with family-sized round-houses. Certain areas,



Excavated dwellings at Skara Brae (Orkney, Scotland), Europe's most complete Neolithic village

such as the lush woodland and grassland surrounding certain low-lying shallow lakes were particularly sought-after and were the home to a large number of different settlements.

By the end of the Mesolithic period, in fifth and sixth millennia BC there is evidence that Mesolithic hunter-gatherers were manipulating the forest tree-cover through the use of fire, to attract and keep game.

This was just a short step away from farming. It is not surprising, therefore, that when farming arrived, shortly before 4000 BC, it was rapidly adopted. We currently believe that the new farmers, who came from the mainland of Europe, amounted to about 20% of the British population. These new farmers brought with them new rites of burial beneath mounds or barrows, of which the long barrows are the best known. Many



of these tombs contained stone chambers built from massive rocks and boulders, known as megaliths.

The roots of Celtic cultures lay in the Bronze Age (2500-700 BC), which probably witnessed the fastest and most radical changes of prehistory. The pioneering developments brought about by the first farmers of the Neolithic (4200-2500 BC) were transformed by a series of major monuments (Stonehenge is the best-known example) which still cover large areas of the English landscape. The period saw the construction of thousands of barrows, or burial mounds, not to mention some 400 henges and other sites. But all of this came to an abrupt halt around 1500 BC, when barrows ceased to be built and sites like Stonehenge were abandoned. The second half of the Bronze Age sees the proliferation of field systems, the earliest of which were in existence by 2000 BC, and the emergence of an elaborate network of villages, roads and major route-ways. Towards the end of the period (from about 1200 BC) we see the construction of the first hill-forts which seem to have been built, not so much as forts in

the modern military sense of the word, but as centres of regional communal authority. Thanks to aerial photographs and remote sensing we can now appreciate that most hill-forts were carefully positioned in the landscape to dominate the surrounding fields and settlements. These would have been the places where people came at regular intervals to meet and exchange goods, livestock and services; doubtless too they were where many marriages and new family alliances were formed.

There is good evidence for sea-going vessels by 2000 BC, which would have been perfectly capable of crossing the Channel. After about 1500 BC cross-Channel voyages would have been routine and from about 1000 BC there may even have been a regular ferry-like service, to judge by the close similarities of some English and continental art styles and objects. The Iron Age (700 BC-AD 43) is often identified with the Celts. These were not an ethnic group, so much as tribal communities who shared many aspects of language and culture. Indeed, even today it is possible to identify with reasonable assurance the archaeological traces

left by, say, the Iceni of Norfolk and the Atrebates of Sussex and Hampshire. When the Romans arrived in Britain in AD 43 they came across a diverse and rich range of cultures, some of which were not openly hostile, nor were opposed to classical ideas and civilisation. In parts of south-eastern Britain (England had yet to be created) the upper echelons of many communities had begun to wear Roman-style clothes. Indeed, the earliest British coins have Latinised Celtic inscriptions which mention the tribal kingdoms that minted them. These date to the first century BC. The first legionaries would also have encountered a fully developed landscape, with fields, roads, lanes, woods, hedges, farms, villages and hamlets. There were centres of regional trade and a flourishing network of ports and harbours along the south, south-west and east coasts. It is still not fully decided whether any true towns existed at the end of the Iron Age (in the sense of self-governing urban centres, with refuse, sewage and town-planning services), but there were undoubtedly some town-sized settlements, some of which may have been in existence as early as 500 BC.





## Teaching the Stone Age

The inclusion of the Stone Age in the proposed 2014 National Curriculum for History in England presents primary teachers with the challenge of having to teach prehistory.

While a period that spans thousands of years may seem daunting, particularly when combined with the obvious lack of documentary sources available, this development provides an excellent opportunity to experiment with using a different type of primary source – the artefact.

Archaeology, the study and interpretation of these artefacts – the material remains of past societies – has provided us with a great deal of knowledge about our prehistoric ancestors and is not so far removed from history as it can at first appear. Artefacts and archaeological evidence can be used in the same way as documentary sources to stimulate debate and to teach pupils the skills of evidence-gathering, interpretation and analysis.

Teachers challenged with exploring the Stone Age can use objects from the past to inspire students within a wide variety of curriculum subjects. A Neolithic axe,

Bronze Age pottery Beaker or Iron Age gold torc can be powerful aids to the young imagination and can provide an excellent focus for storytelling and literacy projects. Artefact recording and site planning are some of the activities that can be used to support maths lessons. In addition, a study of prehistoric pottery could aid a discussion about the physical properties of various materials and be the catalyst for scientific experiments or the basis for a range of art-based projects.

Our recent work with local schools in Horton, Berkshire (funded by CEMEX UK) is a good example of using finds as inspiration. Artefacts uncovered at Kingsmead Quarry, ahead of gravel extraction, were put on display and an exhibition was designed around them. Local primary schools were invited to attend interactive workshops at the exhibition and students were encouraged to engage with the artefacts which included a Palaeolithic handaxe, Mesolithic flint tools and early Bronze Age gold and amber beads.

The display explored the shift from a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle towards that of settled farming communities during the Neolithic period and



Good history work often arises out of developing an enquiry over several lessons, where pupils can explore the topic in more detail and have a definite question to answer. Here are some possible enquiry questions:

- What was *new* about the New Stone Age?
- Which was better to make and use – bronze or iron?
- Why bury gold and not come back for it?
- When do you think it was better to live – Stone Age, Bronze Age or Iron Age?
- If you were Julius Caesar, would you have invaded Britain in 55BC?

stimulated discussion among the students as to why this might have occurred. This debate was facilitated by the use of informative text, 3D reconstructions and the artefacts themselves.

Artefacts can also be used to forge connections with people from the past and bring them to life. An excellent example from Wiltshire is the Amesbury Archer; an early Bronze Age man discovered in a very rich burial near the site of a new school and housing development (archaeological work funded by Bloor Homes and Persimmon Homes).

Some of the artefacts associated with the Archer, including 16 barbed and tanged arrowheads and a slate wristguard to protect the arm from the recoil of an archer's longbow, suggest that he may have been a hunter. Other artefacts are known to have originated on the Continent, and chemical (isotopic) analysis of his teeth has shown that he travelled to Britain from the Alps, indicating that he may have

been a trader. This evidence can be used to stimulate debate on several themes such as the extent of trade networks, migration patterns and modes of transport in prehistoric Britain.

Accessing artefacts is not as much of a challenge as it may seem. For schools that aren't lucky enough to be able to take their students fieldwalking and accumulate their own collection, which I suspect to be most, many local museums, history centres and archaeology units will be able to help. Artefacts can be visited or brought into the classroom through specialist workshops and the use of loan boxes – toolboxes containing artefacts and handy teacher's guides.

Thus bringing the Stone Age to life in the classroom through the use of artefacts can be an exciting opportunity for teachers, rather than a daunting challenge.

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Thank you so much!!!



I remember you telling me that the gold beads came from this lady!!!



## Key ideas

- Not a lot happens
- There are big changes
- There is no written evidence
- New finds often change our ideas about the time
- It's nearly all a load of rubbish!
- Archaeologists disagree!
- You can't do it all!

# Some suggested lesson activities

## 1.

### The Rubbish Bin Activity

At the end of a morning, or afternoon, get your pupils to empty the classroom rubbish bin on to a table. Get them to identify all the rubbish, and, using only the evidence they have in front of them, write a brief account of the morning/afternoon/day. When they have done that, ask them what they have done today that is not included in their accounts. What is missing? Why?

This is a simple activity that can make pupils realise that in prehistory, when we rely upon artefacts as evidence to tell us what life was like, we are only ever going to have a partial account – almost a random account, depending upon what evidence has survived, just like the litter in your bin.

## 2.

### 3,000-year-old shipwreck shows European trade was thriving in Bronze Age

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#### 3,000-year-old shipwreck shows European trade was thriving in Bronze Age

The discovery of one of the world's oldest shipwrecks shows that European trade was thriving even in the Bronze Age, according to experts.



Image 1 of 2

Archaeologists believe the copper, and possibly the tin, was being imported into Britain

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In Archaeology

One exciting thing about prehistory is that archaeologists' ideas are always changing due to new discoveries, like this shipwreck, reported in *The Telegraph*. Show your pupils the pictures and story, and ask what the discovery has added to our view of the Stone Age. Make a news-wall where you – and pupils – can post stories about archaeological discoveries.

[www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/archaeology/7238663/3000-year-old-shipwreck-shows-European-trade-was-thriving-in-Bronze-Age.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/archaeology/7238663/3000-year-old-shipwreck-shows-European-trade-was-thriving-in-Bronze-Age.html)

# 3.

## Houses from Stone Age to Iron Age

This activity is designed to explore Overview, and look specifically at continuity and change.

Use the pictures of houses opposite to fill in the grid below:

	Stone Age	Bronze Age	Iron Age
What is the roof made of?			
What are the walls made of?			
What is the door made of?			
What are the windows made of?			
Is there a chimney?			
What would it be like to live in?			
Anything else you can notice?			
Houses have changed because:			
Houses have stayed the same because:			

Below  
Excavations at Kingsmead  
Quarry, Horton, in 2008  
revealed evidence for  
occupation during the  
Neolithic period (4000-  
2400 BC). The remains of a  
building, dated to between  
3800 and 3650 BC, were  
found and represent one of  
England's oldest houses. A  
further three structures of the  
same date have been found  
on the site so far.  
Karen Nichols from the  
Wessex Archaeology Graphics  
Team has reconstructed one  
of the buildings in 3D.



Celtic roundhouses at the Museum of Wales



# Want to find out more?



## Resources

**Iron Age Torcs:** [www.history.org.uk/resources/primary\\_resource\\_5923\\_202.html](http://www.history.org.uk/resources/primary_resource_5923_202.html)

**Neolithic Axehead:** [www.history.org.uk/resources/primary\\_resource\\_4723\\_202.html](http://www.history.org.uk/resources/primary_resource_4723_202.html)

**PH51: CASE STUDY 1:** Lucy Bradley, Prehistory in the primary curriculum a Stonehenge experience to remember

**PH51: CASE STUDY 4:** Julia Dauban with John Crossland, Working with Gifted and Talented children at an Iron Age hill fort in north Somerset



## Podcasts

**Britain & Ireland 10,000 - 4,200 BC**  
[www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain1](http://www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain1)

**Britain & Ireland 4,200 - 3000 BC**  
[www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain2](http://www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain2)

**Britain & Ireland 3000 - 1500 BC**  
[www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain3](http://www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain3)

**The Celts**  
[www.history.org.uk/go/Celts](http://www.history.org.uk/go/Celts)

**Britain & Ireland 1500 - 800 BC**  
[www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain4](http://www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain4)

**Britain & Ireland 800 - 60 BC**  
[www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain5](http://www.history.org.uk/go/StoneAgeBritain5)

**Ancient British and Irish Pagan Religion**  
[www.history.org.uk/go/AncientPaganBritain](http://www.history.org.uk/go/AncientPaganBritain)



## Places to visit

**The British Museum** has the largest collection of artefacts on display, but many local museums, like The Collection in Lincoln, have innovative and exciting displays on the period.

**Cresswell Crag**, in Nottinghamshire, is a collection of caves and a museum containing remains of Ice Age hunters dating from 55,000 to 10,000 years ago.

**Skara Brae**, in the Orkneys, a World Heritage Site, is probably the best preserved Neolithic Village in existence today.

**Grimes Graves**, in Norfolk, is a Neolithic flint mine in the care of English Heritage

**Flag Fen**, near Peterborough, is a Bronze Age site, combining original remains and a reconstructed village.

**Butser Iron Age Farm**, in Hampshire, is a living Iron Age Farm where you can experience everyday life in the Iron Age.

**Maiden Castle** is a huge, well-preserved Iron Age hill-fort near Dorchester.



## Websites

Butser Ancient Farm, Hampshire:  
[www.butserancientfarm.co.uk](http://www.butserancientfarm.co.uk)

Horrible History Stone Age Song:  
[www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/clips/p00hzpqq](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/clips/p00hzpqq)

3,000 year old shipwreck shows European trade was thriving in Bronze Age.  
[www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/archaeology/7238663/3000-year-old-shipwreck-shows-European-trade-was-thriving-in-Bronze-Age.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/archaeology/7238663/3000-year-old-shipwreck-shows-European-trade-was-thriving-in-Bronze-Age.html)

An introduction to Bronze Age finds  
<http://finds.org.uk/bronzeage>

Bronze age – make a sword  
[www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00z597g/clips](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00z597g/clips)

## What the co-ordinator might do:

## Stone Age to Iron Age

This area is one likely to be less familiar than most to teachers, except perhaps for some isolated events and remains such as Stonehenge. There is also the danger of giving the impression that these years were continuous years of savagery and stagnation. The co-ordinator's role should be to:

- Provide an accessible and manageable overview – this article aims to do this and teachers should be encouraged to read this;
- Urge teachers to avoid stereotypes and distortion;
  - ▶ Devise a few central ideas that you hope all teachers will be able to get over to their class around which the content and teaching ideas can be woven, e.g.
  - ▶ this was an extremely long period of time in which many changes occurred;
  - ▶ we use various period labels such as Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages. There is also some specialised vocabulary such as henges, hill-forts.
  - ▶ although many conventional sources such as written documents are not available there are many clues to this time especially through artefacts and surviving field evidence;
  - ▶ this was a time when many developments and improvements occurred such as in farming, buildings, religion, military development and travel;
  - ▶ although a long time ago there is much that people from this period might recognise such as spinning, weaving, grinding corn;
  - ▶ there are still plentiful remains of this time such as important monuments, local remains, place names etc.
  - ▶ these people were not isolated but there were already widespread links when the Romans came. The Romans certainly did not find a primitive or blank country on which to stamp their civilisation.
- Try to find out if there are interesting local sources of evidence which could be used to enliven the teaching.

Tim Lomas

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[www.wessexarch.co.uk](http://www.wessexarch.co.uk)

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