

TEACHER'S BOOKLET

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

FROM PREHISTORY TO
PRIMARY SCHOOLS

THE BRONZE AGE

METALWORKING ARRIVES IN BRITAIN



2400 - 800 CAL BC

For the first time **metals** and **metalworking** arrives in Britain and **round barrows** and **barrow cemeteries** are built for the dead.

WHERE PEOPLE LIVED



The Bronze Age can be divided into three phases: Early, Middle and Late. The early phase was similar to the Late Neolithic with a patchwork of woodlands and clearances with settlements comprising a few small roundhouses. With the Middle Bronze Age climate improved and people began to spread to uplands (like the Pennines) and into low lying wetland areas (like the East Anglian Fens). More settled farmsteads were built along with field systems for developing agriculture. By the late phase the climate deteriorated and communities were forced to abandon some of their upland and wetland homes. People gathered together in more fortified hilltop enclosures, such as Mam Tor in the Peak District.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC



An important type of monument built during the Early Bronze Age was the earthen round barrow, used to bury the dead. Gib Hill round barrow is an example from the Peak District. Over time a number of people would be buried in these mounds, and in many places round barrows were built in lines creating barrow cemeteries. During the Middle Bronze Age, communities constructed long timber trackways that allowed them both to move through and to live within wetland areas. One of the best preserved timber trackways in this country is Flag Fen in Cambridgeshire, and recent excavations at the neighbouring site of Must Farm have uncovered incredible houses built over a river channel.

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

HOW PEOPLE LIVED

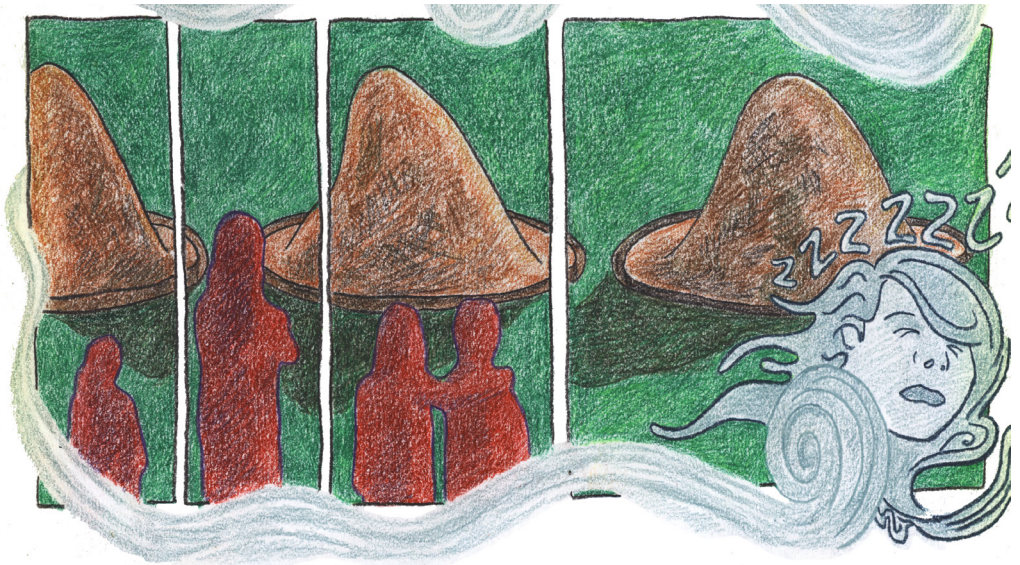


Life in the Bronze Age focussed around the keeping of animals (pastoralism), and the growing of crops (agriculture). The size of small Early Bronze Age settlements suggest people still had quite mobile lives seasonally moving with their flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. Larger Middle Bronze Age farmsteads and field systems indicate an increase in agriculture and a less mobile lifestyle. In the Bronze Age, horses are introduced into Britain, and used with ploughs in these larger field systems. By the Late Bronze Age, the worsening climate made living and farming conditions more difficult. Settlements tended to be built on hilltops or enclosed by ditches, perhaps to provide protection from neighbouring communities.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

During the Bronze Age people lived in households where descent and ancestry seem to have been very important. In the Early Bronze Age particular individuals were given rich burials within round barrows. Perhaps these people were leaders of their community? We know that multiple generations of family groups were buried in round barrows and barrow cemeteries, making them into a monumental 'Family Tree'. By the Middle Bronze Age more people were cremated and buried within large cemeteries, which suggests that Early Bronze Age ideas of leadership and hierarchy were replaced by an emphasis on communities as a whole.



BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

BRONZE AGE TECHNOLOGY



Perhaps the most dramatic change that marks the beginning of the Bronze Age is the arrival of metals into Britain for the first time. Metals, and the knowledge of how to make metal objects came from continental Europe. The first metal objects were made from copper, with bronze and gold following shortly afterwards. In the Early Bronze Age metal objects were probably being used as symbols of power and prestige, rather than practical tools. Carrying a bronze axe, copper dagger or gold button would show how important you were. This new focus upon metalwork led to the creation of mines in areas rich in metal ores. The mines at the Great Orme in North Wales show evidence of intensive extraction of copper that would have been traded across the country.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

Although metal was a new introduction, people were still knapping flint in the Bronze Age, making a wide variety of tool types. Perhaps the most iconic artefacts of the period are flint barbed and tanged arrowheads. People also made new types of pottery including beakers and collared urns. These were used in domestic life as well as placed in burials. Recent excavations at the waterlogged site of Must Farm in Cambridgeshire revealed evidence of Bronze Age people using wood and plant materials to make a wide range of things, including: willow fishtraps; nettle fibre textiles; platters made from tree bark and even a complete wooden wheel!

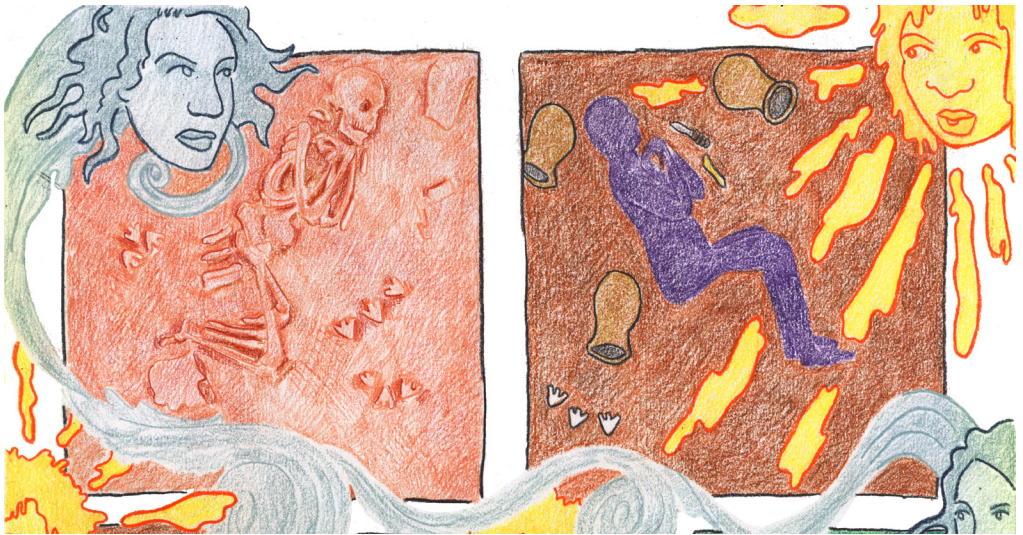


Bronze Age beakers and urn made by Juan Rivero

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

BRONZE AGE BELIEFS



Treatment of the Bronze Age dead was closely tied to peoples' connections with both family and landscape. In the Early Bronze Age, people were buried in round barrows; with later burials and cremations inserted into the barrow mound over time. Barrows were also built in groups showing a connection between all the people buried in the mounds, as a community, but also with lineage and familial connection. Looking at a barrow cemetery was like looking at your family tree! Barrows were also prominent monuments within the environment, regularly placed upon hills and ridgelines, creating a visual link between communities, ancestors and landscape.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

In the Late Bronze Age there was a particular emphasis on water, and the deposition of materials into watery places. People placed things like bronze spear heads and bent and broken swords into Flag Fen. It is thought that bending and breaking was a way of symbolically 'killing' the sword before it was deposited. This 'sacrifice' of precious objects may have been a response to the deteriorating climate towards the end of the Bronze Age which was making wetland areas increasingly difficult to live in. As marsh and bog began swallowing fields and settlements, the materials deposited may have been gifts to gods, deities and spirits in an attempt to save their houses and lands from the advancing water.



BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

GREAT ORME COPPER MINES

LLANDUDNO, NORTH WALES



Photograph: Copyright Alan Simkins / CC BY-SA 2.0

Uncovered in 1987, this is an internationally important site, and thought to be the largest prehistoric Bronze Age mine anywhere in the world. When you visit, have a look at how small some of the tunnels are, and think about how young some of these prehistoric miners (minors!) must have been.

Great Orme Copper Mines: 01492870447.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

MAM TOR HILLTOP

ENCLOSURE

THE PEAK DISTRICT



Photograph: Copyright Rob Bendall (Highfields)

On the summit of Mam Tor sit the remains of a late Bronze Age fortified hilltop enclosure. During the Bronze Age, up to one hundred timber huts sat upon the site. Radiocarbon dating tells us that the huts were occupied in the later phase of the Bronze Age from around about 1200 cal BC. When you visit the site, think about what kind of circumstances would have made people choose to live in such a place, and don't forget to enjoy the fantastic views!

Mam Tor, Castleton, The Peak District, Derbyshire.

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

BRONZE AGE

3D PRINTED BARB AND TANG ARROWHEAD



Flint barbed and tanged arrowheads are a characteristic artefact from the Bronze Age. In your pack we have included a 3D printed example of one. If you look at the base of the arrowhead, you will see two notches. The section in the centre of the two notches is called the tang. The tang is designed to slot into the arrow shaft. The two sections on the outside of the notches are called the barbs. Barbs are designed to stop the arrow coming out once it has penetrated its target.