

TEACHER'S BOOKLET

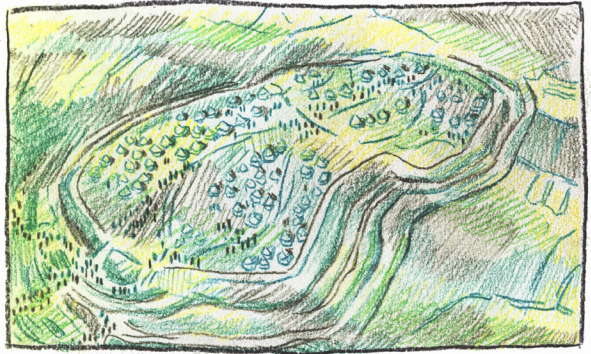


The University of Manchester

FROM PREHISTORY TO
PRIMARY SCHOOLS

THE IRON AGE

SOPHISTICATED CRAFTWORKING DEVELOPS



800 CAL BC - 43 AD

Social organisation and tools become more sophisticated and people began to use coins and **trade across Europe**. Prehistory ends with the **Roman invasion** at the end of the Iron Age.

WHERE PEOPLE LIVED

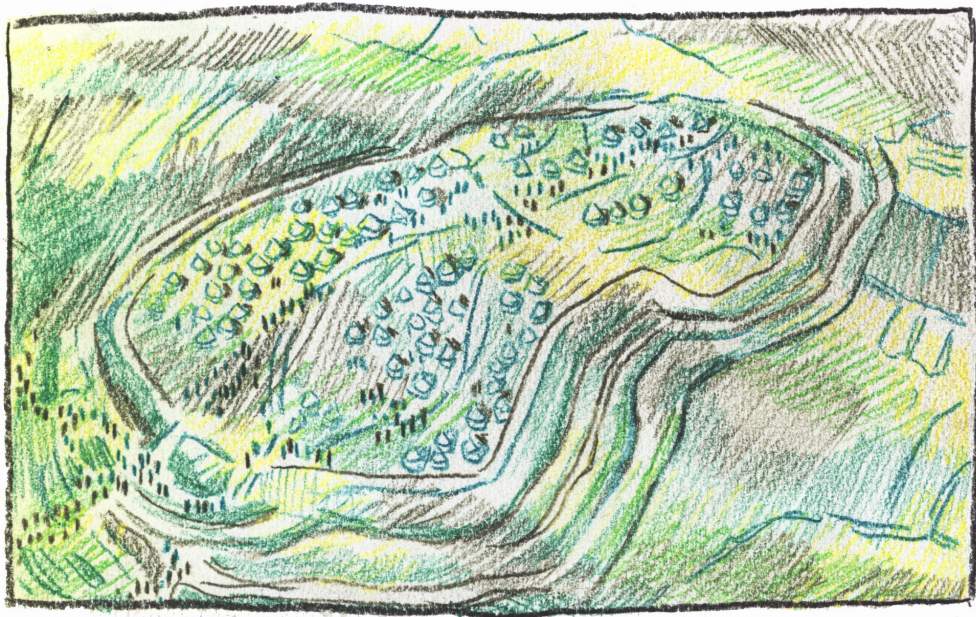
Photograph: Copyright Poulton Research Project



Most of Britain was occupied by the start of the Iron Age, although because of a slight climatic downturn temperatures were cooler and summers wetter. The landscape was a patchwork of woodlands and field systems. The field systems were used as pasture for grazing sheep and cows, and arable land for growing crops, while the woodland was used to provide timber for buildings and fuel. Most people lived in small farms with their families and a few neighbours, but some people lived in larger villages made up of roundhouses. A roundhouse was a timber dwelling 6-10 meters in diameter with a thatched roof.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC



An important type of site during the Iron Age was the hillfort. These were large enclosures surrounded by earthen banks and ditches, usually on top of a hill. A well known example is the hillfort at Danebury in Hampshire. Population expanded during the Iron Age and archaeologists thought that hillforts were a result of tension and conflict over land and resources. However, now archaeologists think that most hillforts were only occupied at certain times and were perhaps gathering places for particular events, such as fairs, markets and other important ceremonies.

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

HOW PEOPLE LIVED



The Iron Age was the most densely populated period in British prehistory. Life revolved around growing crops, keeping horses and raising cattle, sheep and pigs. Some members of the community would move around the landscape with their herds, journeying between grazing, water and shelter throughout the year. Others would stay at home to tend crops and plough the fields using horses, which were also ridden and used to pull chariots! Crafts were an important part of Iron Age life. People made colourful textiles, iron tools and weapons, pottery and impressive wooden architecture. For Iron Age children, school would have been the local iron smithy, weaving shed or looking after the flock.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

Iron Age society is regularly thought of as a 'tribe' ruled by a royal 'chief', however, evidence for this is rare. Communities probably had leaders but they were likely to have been a prominent member of the community, such as a priest (sometimes called a Druid), skilled craftsperson or warrior. The Iron Age is also thought of as a time of violence, however this is not necessarily true. Some areas show an increase in levels of violence, whilst others don't. At a time of population increase and climatic downturn the tension between conflict and good social relations was a constant feature. A range of activities, such as trade and exchange, feasting, sports and competitions (including chariot racing) were used as ways to keep the peace and maintain good neighbourly relations.



BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

IRON AGE TECHNOLOGY

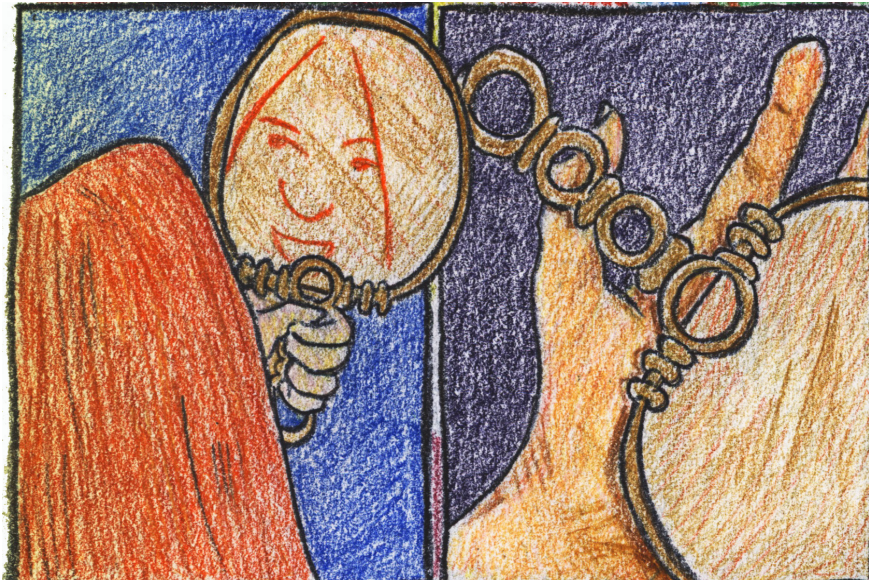


The most significant technological change in the Iron Age was the arrival of iron and ironworking, which was used to make iconic objects like swords. However, although iron was harder than bronze, which came before it, it was also more difficult to work with, and rusted if it was not taken care of. As a result, many decorative metal items continued to be made out of bronze. This included broaches, which were essentially prehistoric safety pins! The Iron Age also saw the use of metal coins made from gold and silver for the first time. Craft activities used a wide range of materials: iron swords would have antler handles, bronze or wooden scabbards and leather straps. Containers would have been made from skin, wood and pottery.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

Iron Age artefacts are known for their intricate celtic artwork; decorated Iron Age swords, shields, mirrors, helmets and headdresses are some of the most beautiful objects in British prehistory. Many of these included rare or unusual materials, such as jet from the NE coast of Britain, amber from the Baltic, pink coral from the Mediterranean, and exotic blue glass, possibly from Syria! These exotic materials were important because of the journeys they had been on, and many may have had symbolic powers: the pink coral may have been seen to protect or heal people because of its flesh-like colour. The working of iron ore into iron would have been seen as a powerful transformation, and linked to ideas of regeneration, fertility and magic. Iron Age mirrors in particular may have been important divination tools.



BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

IRON AGE BELIEFS



In the Iron Age people believed in a number of gods and goddesses, all present in the world around them. Some of these gods lived in particular parts of the landscape, such as woodlands, groves and springs. Others were in the form of divine animals such as Epona, the horse goddess. The gods and goddesses that different communities worshipped were probably coloured by the local landscapes; for people living near modern-day Bath, with its natural springs, Sulis, the goddess of the spring would have been important. Water was seen as an important way of communicating with both gods and ancestors. Gifts and offerings were placed in lakes, rivers and bogs, and these were seen as powerful places within the Iron Age landscape.

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

In the Iron Age most people did not bury their dead. Instead, some people were left out so that their bodies would break down naturally. This is known as excarnation. People were also cremated with their ashes buried in pots. In some places bodies, or body parts were deposited in rivers and other watery places, and evidence shows that some communities deposited people's heads in this way. In all of these examples there is an emphasis on transformation and regeneration of the body and the soul of the dead. This fits in with broader symbols of creation and recreation. In what is now Yorkshire some people were given an extravagant and iconic chariot burial. However, these rich burials seem to have been reserved for particular individuals, who may have had interesting lives, or a worrying death.

Image: Copyright Dr Melanie Giles



BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

IRON AGE SITES

POULTON RESEACH PROJECT



Poulton, just south of Chester is a site that spans the Early, Middle and Late Iron Age. Having found evidence of at least nine roundhouses, experimental archaeologists have built a new one at Poulton, to explore the different methods and materials that would have been needed in the past. If you book in advance the site is open to visitors. When you visit, think about how many people it may have taken to build the roundhouse, how long it may have taken, as well as who may have lived there.

To arrange a visit contact: kvcootes@hotmail.co.uk

MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

DANEBURY HILLFORT



Photograph: Copyright Hampshire Hub and University of Southampton

Danebury is an Iron Age Hillfort in Hampshire that was excavated between the 1970s and 1990s, and consequently it is one of the better understood examples in this country. In the Iron Age it was occupied for around 500 years and only abandoned with the arrival of the Romans. When you visit Danebury, experience how it feels climbing the hill to get into the hillfort. Then think about how many families may have lived within the hillfort. Why do you think people chose to live at Danebury?

Danebury, Stockbridge, Hampshire, SO20 6HZ

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

IRON AGE

3D PRINTED MIRROR



In the Iron Age, mirrors were made from iron or bronze and probably not used as mirrors are today. Because of how they were buried and deposited it is believed that mirrors were seen as powerful tools for seeing into the past and the future. Included in this pack is your own 3D printed mirror. How do you think a mirror might have been used to see into the past or the future?