

Prehistory 2: The Bronze Age



The Bronze Age

(2500 BC—800 BC)

During the Bronze Age the people living in Britain began to use copper and then bronze to make tools and weapons. Bronze was 90% copper and 10% tin and much harder than copper on its own. Copper ore and tin oxide was heated in a furnace to make molten bronze that could be poured into clay or sand moulds.



Burials of important people take place in small round barrows with sometimes later burials added. Many of these burials have highly decorative **Beaker** pottery in them. It is believed that some of these Beaker people came to Britain from Europe bringing with them the knowledge of metallurgy.



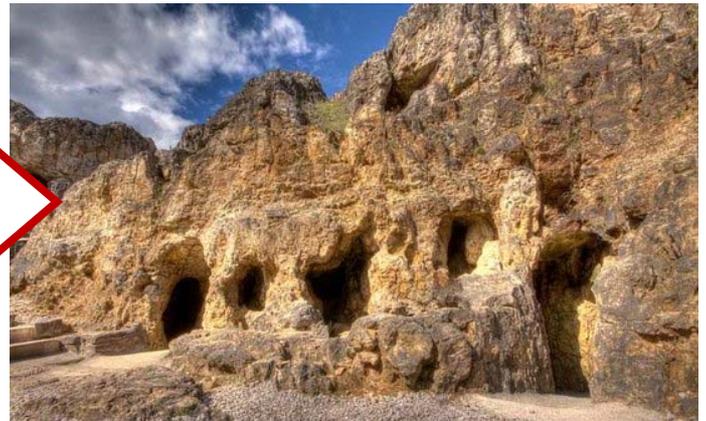
Decoration could be applied to the pottery by pressing a bone or wooden comb, using a piece of twisted cord or by the use of fingernails to create the impressions on the wet clay before firing on an open fire.





The [Amesbury Archer](#) burial near to Stonehenge is the richest Bronze Age burial found in Britain. He arrived in Britain from around the Alps region in Europe and was buried with around 100 objects including, copper knives, gold hair tresses, pots and archer's wrist guards.

Tin was mined from Devon and Cornwall and copper ore from sites such as the [Great Orme](#) mine in Wales which extended to a depth of 70m.



The [Isleham Hoard](#) is the largest collection of bronze items ever found in Britain. It consists of around 6500 objects from swords, spearheads and axes to ornaments and sheet bronze.

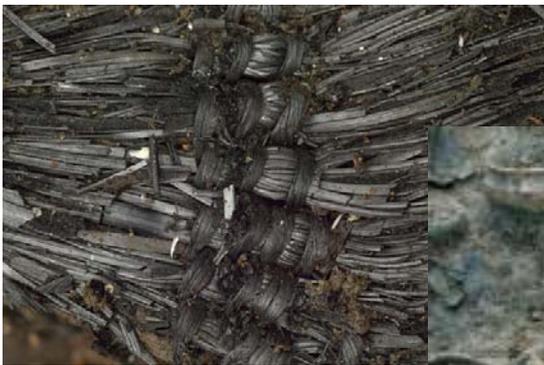
The Bronze Age saw a steady progression into metalworking and more widespread farming. As the population increased so more extensive forest clearances took place to increase food production. The loom was invented and woolen clothes became prevalent. Houses tended to be round with conical roofs and either stone or wattle and daub walls.



[Flag Fen](#) on the edge of Peterborough is a unique Bronze Age kilometre long wooden causeway and platform preserved in the wetland. Buried under the ground are 60,000 upright timbers as well as 250,000 horizontal planks along with many ritual offerings of swords and personal items.



The Late Bronze Age site at [Must Farm](#), nearby to Flag Fen, has recently been excavated. It was a settlement of stilted roundhouses constructed on a river that burnt down and collapsed into the water preserving not only the timbers but textiles, wooden wheels, carved wooden bowls and also dietary information.



Dubbed the 'Pompeii of the Fens' the site finds include (from left to right above), textile fragment, complete pots *in situ* and a socketed axe.

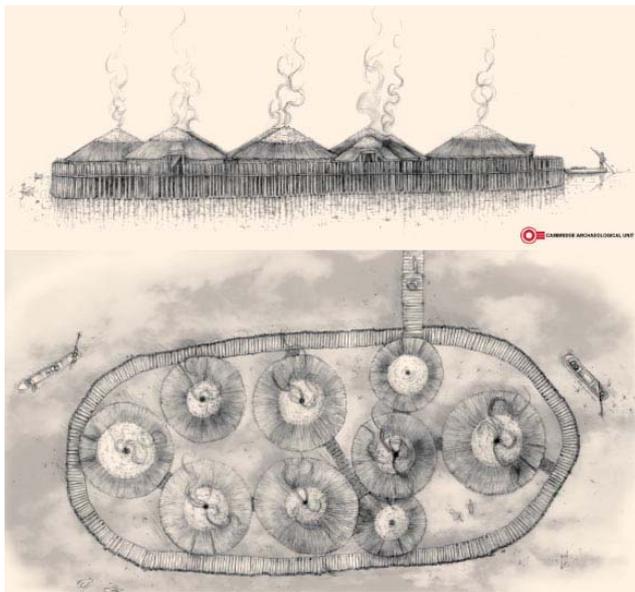


Further study

A selection of Bronze Age sites to explore

The Flag Fen Archaeology Park

<https://www.vivacity-peterborough.com/>



Must Farm

The major Bronze Age excavation by Cambridge Archaeological Unit.



Seahenge

The Holme Timber Circle (Seahenge) now on display at Kings Lynn Museum.

<http://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/>



Great Orme Copper Mines

<http://www.greatormemines.info/>



Activities

Bronze Age themes to try out in the classroom or at home.



Design your own Beaker pottery. Carefully impress your design using a spoon handle edge into a rectangular piece of polystyrene. You can draw the design on first if you wish, use zig-zag patterns, small straight lines, dots or even your fingernails. Once complete use an ink roller to coat the polystyrene and print your design onto paper or card.

Or even try your hand at making your own coil pot using air-drying clay. See our sheet on '*How to Make a Prehistoric Pot*' for more information.



Make your own **Bush Barrow Lozenge**. Cut out a square of cardboard and cover in gold foil or paper. Carefully pencil in your design then impress the pattern with a blunt tool such as a teaspoon handle.

Arrange a trip to **Hands on Heritage** to try out ancient crafts and skills.



Visit: <http://handsonheritage.weebly.com/>

