

Prehistory 3: The Iron Age



The Iron Age

800 BC—AD 43

The Iron Age saw the gradual adoption of ironworking and the use of iron implements, although this was not widespread until after 500 BC. Iron ore was Towards the end of the Iron Age strong regional tribal groups were established all across the country with their accompanying hill-forts.



Iron ore was relatively easy to find, it required high temperatures to separate the metal out. As its melting point was higher than bronze, it could not be poured into a mould like bronze but required hammering into the desired shape.

Other innovations during the later stages of the Iron Age include; the potter's wheel (mainly in south-east Britain), the lathe for woodworking and the rotary quern (replica, on right) for grinding flour.



Coinage was introduced into south eastern Britain during the late second century BC, influenced by trade with the Romans. The name of the tribal king sometimes appear on coins, written in Latin. (Iceni coin pictured on right).





There are nearly 3000 Iron Age hill-forts across Britain, from small enclosure to massive, multi-ditched examples like [Maiden Castle](#) (left). Earlier sites tended to be used as meeting places but those that remained in use evolved into planned settlements.

The standard Iron Age home was the roundhouse, built from timber or stone with thatch or turf roof. Unenclosed settlements of a few huts to village size settlements existed primarily in East Anglia.



Highly decorated metalwork was produced during the Iron Age, such as the gold torcs (left), bracelets, rings and coins, part of the [Snettisham Hoard](#). The [Battersea Shield](#) (bottom left) was found in the River Thames in 1857, made from bronze and red glass. Many of the fine items produced are inspired by the early *Hallstatt* and the later *La Tene* Iron Age cultures from Switzerland and alpine Europe.



Further study

A selection of sites across Britain to further explore the Iron Age.

Maiden Castle

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/maiden-castle/>



Butser Ancient Farm

Experimental archaeology site.

<http://www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/>

Danebury hill-fort

The most extensively excavated hill-fort in Britain.

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/countryside/danebury.htm>



By the end of the Iron Age several large settlements have developed (known as *oppida*) such as Colchester, St Albans and Silchester in southern England, associated with Roman trade, rich burials and tribal power.



Activities

Iron Age themed ideas to try out in the classroom or at home.

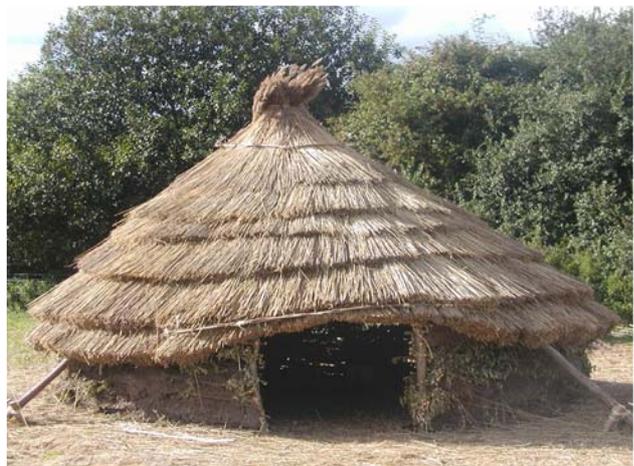


Woad Warrior

Using modern blue face paints turn your class into fearless woad warriors!

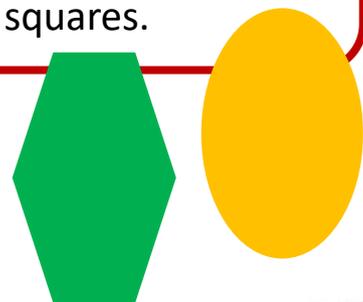
Roundhouse

Build your own roundhouse using our '*How to Build an Iron Age Roundhouse*'



Shield

Cut out a cardboard shield shape (below) then choose a base colour for it and add your designs, use spirals, stars and squares.



Arrange a trip to [Hands on Heritage](http://handsonheritage.weebly.com/) to try out ancient crafts and skills.

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

