



BERKSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Patron: The Late Queen

President: Professor Michael Fulford CBE FBA FSA

Teaching about Archaeology in the School Curriculum: A Guide for Primary Teachers

1. The Stone Age

a) Background information for teachers

[The National Curriculum highlights the importance of causes, connections, changes, similarities and contrasts, significance and use of historical terminology.]

For the Stone Age this could include late Neolithic hunter-gatherers and early farmers, for example Skara Brae (DfE 2013).]

1. When was the Stone Age in Britain?

The Stone Age began about 802,000 years ago and ended about 4200 years ago. It is divided into three stages:

- Old Stone Age (Palaeolithic) 800,000 BC – 10,500 BC
- Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic) 10,500 BC – 4000 BC
- New Stone Age (Neolithic) 4000 BC- 2200 BC

The Palaeolithic came first. It lasted a very long time. Early humans (including Neanderthal people) probably first arrived in Britain as early as 800,000 BC (the beginning of the Palaeolithic). Modern humans (Homo Sapiens) arrived in about 40,000 BC. The climate was often very harsh – the land would have been frozen and treeless during the series of seven glacial periods. As water was locked up in the glaciers, the sea level was lower, so Britain was part of mainland Europe. People probably moved into Britain in the warmer spells between the glacial periods and left when it got colder. People were hunters. They made and used flint and bone tools.

The Mesolithic began at the end of the last of the glacial periods – at about 10,500 BC. The melting of the ice meant that sea levels rose and Britain was cut off from Europe by the newly created English Channel and North Sea. People were nomadic – they hunted and gathered food, moving around their territories on a seasonal basis following herds of deer and knowing where to find berries, plants and shellfish. They made tools from flint and bones, for example arrow heads and scrapers, they may have even made implements such as oars, and they wore jewellery such as stone and amber beads.

2. What happened in the Neolithic (the New Stone Age)?

The Neolithic (the New Stone Age) began at about 4000 BC (so about 6000 years ago). It is from this part of the Stone Age that we find most evidence of the people who lived in Britain. People moving into Britain from Europe at this time brought ideas about farming with them. Native pigs were kept. Sheep, goats and cattle, and crops such as wheat and barley were introduced.

With the growth of farming, people probably became more settled and began to live in more permanent houses, built out of wood (as found at Horton, Berkshire) and or stone (at Skara Brae, Orkney).

Neolithic people built mounds called long barrows, and later chambered tombs, in which to bury their dead (for example at West Kennet in Wiltshire). They built circular causewayed enclosures (areas of land surrounded and protected by circular ditches and banks), and then new circular enclosures called henges, some with stone circles (for example Avebury and Stonehenge). These were probably used as seasonal meeting places.

3. What was the landscape like in Southern Britain in the Neolithic?

The landscape would have looked more wooded as there were many more trees than today. However, the Neolithic farmers began to cut down some parts of the forests to create clearings in which to grow crops and herd animals. There were no roads or towns, but there were tracks, for instance the Ridgeway. Towards the end of the Neolithic, people began to build massive monuments in the landscape like Durrington Walls, Avebury, Stonehenge, and the huge mound at Silbury in Wiltshire.

4. What was the climate of Britain like in the Neolithic?

In the Neolithic the climate would have been similar to that of today, but slightly warmer.

5. How did people live in the Neolithic?

- Neolithic people lived all over the British Isles – from the south coast to the islands of Shetland and Orkney in the north, and to Ireland in the west. However, the total number of people was small. Although there is not much evidence on the landscape, we know that they lived in Berkshire - for instance at Datchet, near Windsor. However there is more substantial evidence from Wiltshire, for example in the Stonehenge area.
- Some people, especially in the north of Britain, lived in stone houses (eg Skara Brae). Further south they probably made timber huts. We can see some evidence of where people had dug holes (called postholes) for the wooden posts that supported the building.
- They had fire to keep warm and cook. People made beer and made pottery – round-bottomed pots and beautifully decorated pots called Grooved Ware.
- People farmed animals and crops. They had simple ploughs called ards.
- They mined flint (for example Grimes Graves in Norfolk) and knew how to work it skilfully to make axes, scrapers for cleaning animal skins, arrowheads and spearheads. They also made stone axes which were beautifully polished – probably for rituals rather than for everyday use.
- They worked skins with needles to make clothes and footwear.
- They traded with one another, for example polished axes from the Lake District have been found in the south of Britain and axes from Cornwall are found in the north.
- They held social events, sometimes in important meeting places.
- Analysis of a Stone Age skeleton (called the Cheddar Man) discovered in a cave in Somerset, showed that people at that time probably had dark skins, dark brown hair, and blue or green eyes.



Figure 1: The model of Cheddar Man rendered by Kennis & Kennis Reconstructions © Tom Barnes/Channel 4

6. Why did the Neolithic end?

People discovered metal deposits and started to work the metal into products. The first metals found were copper and tin – which produced bronze (hence the Bronze Age which came next). Then iron was discovered – so the Iron Age followed the Bronze age.

7. What evidence is there of Stone Age people living in Berkshire?

Very little evidence has been found of Stone Age people living in Berkshire: mostly the evidence consists of artefacts such as arrowheads and flint blades (see illustrations below). However four 6-post rectangular houses were found at Kingsmead Quarry in Horton. One of these is reconstructed at Butser Ancient Farm in Hampshire. Information about it can be seen in Reading Museum.

However, there are spectacular examples of Neolithic building in nearby Wiltshire - at Stonehenge and Avebury, and Silbury Hill.

The Berkshire section of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) holds a database of the archaeological evidence that has been found in the county. In the box below you can see what the Berkshire PAS says about the Neolithic finds that they have recorded:

“... only 5 finds from West Berkshire have been recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) database, and only 7 from East Berkshire. These include tools such as a stone axehead, flint blades, and an oblique arrowhead – as in the photos below



BERK-BC7542. Copyright: The Portable Antiquities Scheme, License: CC-BY 2.0

This stone axe head was found in Lambourn, West Berkshire and dates to c. 3500-2100 BC. This is one of only two stone axeheads found in the whole of Berkshire. It has a curved cutting edge and is made of an igneous low silica rock, between gabbro and coarse-grained dolerite in terms of grain size. This type of stone is not natural to the southeast area so therefore has been imported into the area.



BERK-1994EC. Copyright: The Portable Antiquities Scheme, License: CC-BY 2.0

We don't get many lithic arrowheads in Berkshire so it was lovely to see this come in last year! Found in Hermitage West Berkshire, this oblique arrowhead dated to c. 2700 – 2400 BC (Later Neolithic) is sub-triangular in shape and is asymmetrical with a hollowed base to one side.



BERK-BABC71. Copyright: The Portable Antiquities Scheme, License: CC-BY 2.0

This flint laurel leaf knife was found in White Waltham, East Berkshire and dates to c. 4000 – 2200 BC. Evident by its name it is leaf-shaped and is worked on both sides and is covered on both sides with scaled, low angle flaking. One edge has scaled retouch whereas the other edge is highly worn with less evidence of retouch. This knife must have been a heavy-duty knife!”

b) Resources to support teaching about the New Stone Age (Neolithic), with particular reference to Berkshire.

In this section we have listed places and websites where information about the Neolithic in Berkshire can be found. These are divided into:

- i) Museums
- ii) Websites
- iii) Practical activities
- iv) Places to visit

i) Museums

West Berkshire Museum and the Berkshire Portable Antiquities Scheme.

The resources for learning about the Neolithic in Berkshire at the West Berkshire Museum are set out in the table below. They include resources provided by the Berkshire Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) which is a scheme managed by the British Museum and which describes, dates and records archaeological objects that people have found in the local area. The Berkshire PAS officer is based at the West Berkshire Museum.

(NB data below current at 2021)

Type of resource	Details	Where located	contact
Static displays *Guided visits available *Self-guided visits available	Free self-guided visit to West Berkshire Museum's permanent exhibition, Lives and Landscapes, which includes a prehistory section. Guided visits of the permanent exhibition available on request. 'Design a Museum Tour' led session for KS2/3 focuses on the objects in the permanent exhibition. Museum only session (on a Monday or Tuesday). It costs £45 for a class of up to 30 children and the session is about 2 hours in duration. Session includes activity sheets.	West Berkshire Museum	Learning and Participation Officer: clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk
Artefacts *Available to handle at school *Available to handle at another location. *Loan boxes	Two Stone Age loan boxes, containing real and replica objects as well as teacher notes on the objects, available to borrow for a three week period (£15 per box). Must be collected/returned by a school representative from/to the Museum on the agreed dates/times. *'Stone Age' led session including real objects. Session can be delivered in the Museum or at school. It costs £45 for a class of 30 children and the session is about 1.5 hours in duration. Session includes object handling and activity sheets. An overview (including curriculum links) of the session is available on request.	West Berkshire Museum	Learning and Participation Officer: clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk

Printed pupil learning materials (eg activity sheets) *Free *Available to purchase	Free and/or paid for (50p) trails of the Museum's permanent exhibition.	West Berkshire Museum	Learning and Participation Officer: clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk
Electronic pupil learning materials (eg videos, you tube, emailed documents etc)	West Berkshire Heritage's lifelong learning webpage with various free and downloadable resources, some of which focus on prehistory: www.westberkshireheritage.org/life-long-learning	West Berkshire Heritage website	West Berkshire Museum Learning and Participation Officer: clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk
Talks from experts *At school *At another place *Typical cost	*Please see 'Stone Age' led session in 'Artefacts'.	West Berkshire Museum	Learning and Participation Officer: clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk
Location of stone age features in Berkshire	Details of Stone Age sites in West Berkshire's Historic Environment Record available online on the Heritage Gateway: www.heritagegateway.org.uk (instructions on using it here: https://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=36550&p=0), West Berkshire Council's online map: https://gis2.westberks.gov.uk/webapps/OnlineMap or by contacting the Archaeology Service: https://info.westberks.gov.uk/her . Stone Age artefacts found by members of the public and recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme available online here: https://finds.org.uk/database/search/advanced	West Berkshire Archaeology Service Portable Antiquities Scheme	Assistant Archaeologist (HER and Outreach): archaeology@westberks.gov.uk Berkshire Finds Liaison Officer: Philip.Smith1@westberks.gov.uk
Further information	Details of the Museum and Learning and Participation Service can be found here: www.westberkshireheritage.org	West Berkshire Museum	Learning and Participation Officer:

available on website	Details of the Archaeology Service can be found here: www.westberkshireheritage.org/local-heritage-and-here: https://info.westberks.gov.uk/lookingintothepast Details of the Portable Antiquities Scheme Finds Liaison Officer for Berkshire can be found here: www.westberkshireheritage.org/local-heritage/portable-antiquities-scheme-and-here: https://finds.org.uk/counties/berkshire	West Berkshire Archaeology Service Portable Antiquities Scheme	clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk Assistant Archaeologist (HER and Outreach): archaeology@westberks.gov.uk Berkshire Finds Liaison Officer: Philip.Smith1@westberks.gov.uk
Other information	Family craft activities (e.g. Messy Museum Days) during the school holidays are history-based and sometimes focus on prehistory: www.westberkshireheritage.org/whats-on Archaeology craft activities during the school holidays and the annual Festival of Archaeology sometimes focus on the Stone Age.	West Berkshire Museum West Berkshire Archaeology Service	Learning and Participation Officer: clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk Assistant Archaeologist (HER and Outreach): archaeology@westberks.gov.uk

Reading museum

The resources for learning about the Neolithic in Berkshire at the Reading Museum are set out in the table below.

Type of resource	details	contact
Static displays Self-guided visits available	Free self-guided visits to Reading Museum's galleries which include a prehistory and Natural History section.	Learning Team: Museum.education@reading.gov.uk
Artefacts	Stone Age loan boxes, containing real objects as well as teacher notes on the objects, available to borrow and use in school for a period of half a term. Delivery and	Learning Team: Museum.education@reading.gov.uk

*Available to handle at school *Available to handle at another location. *Loan boxes	collection service is suspended due to COVID restrictions: all boxes must be collected/returned by a school representative from/to the Museum on the agreed dates/times. Current price £45 per box per half term (September 2021-August 2022. Up to date pricing on RM's website); membership agreements available (See https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/schools/school-loan-boxes for details) "Prehistory" session for primary schools. Led by experienced session leaders in the prehistory gallery in the Museum. The session lasts 1 hour and 45 minutes and includes object handling and activities. Current fee £150 per session for a max of 35 children (September 2021-August 2022. Up to date pricing on RM's website). See https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/schools/prehistory for details. "Prehistory" virtual session for primary schools. Available from Spring Term 2022. This virtual version of the session is delivered live by one of the museum's learning officers. It includes videos, activities, 3D objects virtual handling and it is supported by a teacher pack of resources to be used before during and after the virtual session. The session lasts 1 hour, and it costs £75 for a class of max 35 children (current price, September 2021-August 2022. Up to date pricing on RM's website). For more information on virtual session see https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/schools/virtual-sessions)	
Electronic pupil learning materials (eg videos, you tube, emailed documents etc)	Pdf notes of all our loan boxes are available to download for free from our database. No purchase necessary. Teachers can search for prehistory boxes at http://schoolloans.readingmuseum.org.uk/ and simply download the information.	Learning Team: Museum.education@reading.gov.uk
Support material for teachers (eg teachers packs) *printed *electronic	The Museum Website publishes regularly blogs on a variety of subjects. On Stone Age settlers in the Reading area see https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/blog/readings-earliest-settlers Downloadable teachers pack available as part of our "Prehistory" Virtual Session. (see "Artefacts" section)	Learning Team: Museum.education@reading.gov.uk

Further information available on website	Details of Reading Museum Learning Services can be found here: https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/schools	Learning Team: Museum.education@reading.gov.uk
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Other museums

Resources to support pupils' learning about the Stone Age can also be found in the following museums:

- Maidenhead Heritage Centre <https://www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk>
- Windsor Museum <https://www.windsormuseum.org.uk>

ii) Useful Websites

- British Museum <https://www.britishmuseum.org/learn/schools>
- Berkshire Archaeological Society <https://www.berksarch.co.uk>
- Marlow Archaeological Group <http://www.marlowarch.co.uk>
- South Oxfordshire Archaeological Society <https://www.soagarch.org.uk>
- Reading Museum <https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/schools>
- Maidenhead Heritage Centre <https://www.maidenheadheritage.org.uk>
- West Berkshire Museum <https://www.westberkshireheritage.org>
- Windsor Museum <https://www.windsormuseum.org.uk>

Portable antiquities scheme. Philip Smither - Berkshire finds officer.

<https://finds.org.uk/counties/berkshire/finds-through-the-ages-the-neolithic-period-in-berkshire/>

Newspaper and journal articles (including photos) about the finding of the Neolithic causewayed enclosure near Windsor. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/feb/08/discovery-of-windsor-neolithic-monument-excites-archaeologists>

and <https://archaeology.co.uk/articles/hortons-neolithic-houses.htm>

iii) Practical activities.

Finds boxes.

These allow pupils to practice excavating and handling the artefacts they find. Pupils can identify, draw and record their findings. Finds boxes are provided by some museums (for instance West Berkshire Museum and Reading Museum - see details in section 2b above) and some archaeological societies, or you can make up your own.

iv) Places to visit

Very little evidence has been found of Stone Age people living in Berkshire. An enclosure with houses was found at Datchet but it is not available to visit. However, there are good examples of Neolithic building nearby in Wiltshire - at Stonehenge and Avebury, and Silbury Hill.

Butser Ancient farm has a reconstruction of a Neolithic house and other buildings from later ages

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