



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

2. The Bronze 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 Bronze Age this could include "Bronze Age religion, technology and travel, for example, Stonehenge" (DfE 2013: p3)

1. When was the Bronze Age?

The Bronze Age began in about 2,400 BC (so about 4,400 years ago) and ended in about 800 BC. It lasted for approximately 1,600 years, during which changes took place very gradually.

2. What happened in the Bronze Age?

At the beginning of the Bronze Age, a new group of people moved into Britain from Europe. They brought with them a different and distinctive culture called the Beaker culture. They also brought new technology - they knew how to mine metal ores such as copper, tin and gold, and make metal objects. In about 2,200 BC they discovered how to make a new and harder metal, bronze, by mixing copper and tin.

DNA evidence shows that the Beaker people may have looked different from the existing population of Britain. The existing population had olive-brown skin, dark hair and blue eyes, whereas the Beaker people may have had lighter skin, blonde hair and blue eyes.

3. What did the landscape in Berkshire look like in the Bronze Age compared to today?

The landscape was still mostly woodland and forest but was increasingly being cleared for agriculture and animal herding.

4. What was the climate in Berkshire like in the Bronze Age?

At first the climate was a little warmer than today but from about 1,000 BC it became wetter and cooler.

5. How did people live in the Bronze Age?

Housing

By the middle of the Bronze Age, people had started building and living in 'round houses', using wood for the walls and thatch for the roof. There were no windows and there was a fire in the centre. Later in the Bronze Age, houses are found grouped together into settlements, sometimes surrounded by a ditch or wall and by fields for crops and animals. Many hut and field walls are visible on Dartmoor.

Farming

Animal farming increased in scale, so more forest and woodland was cleared to make fields.

Technology

Pottery was made by hand, using both coil and thumb methods, for example Beaker pots, food vessels and collared urns.

Copper, tin and gold were mined in areas of Britain such as Cornwall and Wales. They were worked into objects such as decorative items. Later in the Bronze Age metals were also imported from Europe. In about 2200BC people discovered how to mix copper and tin (about 10% tin to 90% copper) to make bronze which was a much harder metal. Most tools such as axes, gouges and knives were now made of bronze. Swords, rapiers and spearheads appear – these might represent an increase in social conflict or warfare and were probably a symbol of the rise of social leaders/elites.

Trading

Metal ores and objects were traded with Europe.

Religion

At the beginning of the Bronze Age, people buried their dead curled up on their side and with their possessions (for example the burial of the Amesbury Archer in Wiltshire). The burial place was marked with an earth mound called a barrow or tumulus. These are often found in 'cemeteries', for example the seven barrows at Lambourn and the five barrows on Mortimer Common in Berkshire. They are also located on the skyline, as around Stonehenge. Many barrows are near circles made of stones, earth or timber. These circles (hengese) were probably places where ceremonies and gatherings took place. A henge was usually ringed by a bank with a ditch on the inside, as at Avebury in Wiltshire. Later in the Bronze Age, people were often cremated and their remains placed in collared urns at the centre of a round barrow or in flat cemeteries.

What did people wear?

Clothes such as skirts, tunics, hats and cloaks were made of wool, and clothes were also made from animal skins. Some people wore jewellery such as a torc, which was a neck ring. The Mouldsford torc can be seen in Reading Museum.

What food did people eat?

People ate food that they had grown, such as wheat, barley, and vegetables. They also ate meat from their domesticated animals and from animals that they had hunted. They would also have

gathered wild fruits and foods, and they knew how to make beer (as analysis of the contents of some Beaker pots has shown!).

How did people travel?

Bronze Age people used long rowing boats such as the Dover boat that could cross the English Channel. Horses were domesticated and ridden. Oxen or horses pulled wheeled carts, and by the end of the Bronze Age horse drawn chariots were in existence.

6. Why did the Bronze Age end?

A new metal - iron - was introduced into Britain from Europe. Iron ore was more widespread than copper and tin, and it was harder and more versatile than bronze for use in making tools and weapons. Bronze did continue to be used for other purposes such as decoration and jewellery.

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

Artefacts

A few examples of high-status jewellery and weapons have been found – for example:

- The Lambourne Hoard (in West Berkshire Museum). It consists of 2 gold armlets and 3 gold bracelets.
- The Yattendon Hoard discovered in 1876 when Yattendon Court was being built. It comprises 57 bronze artefacts – mostly tools and weapons.
- The Moulsoford Torc - a neck ornament. (It can be seen in Reading Museum)
- A late Bronze Age spearhead from Oakley Court, Bray. (It can be seen in Reading Museum. Acquisition number 1953.170.1)

Earthworks

Barrows (eg at Bill Hill in Bracknell, Seven Barrows in Upper Lambourn, and on Mortimer Common.)

b) Resources to support teaching about the Bronze Age, with particular reference to Berkshire.

In this section we have listed places and websites where information about the Bronze Age 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 Bronze Age 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	One Bronze Age loan box, 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.	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	'Stone Age' led session touches on the Bronze Age.	West Berkshire Museum	Learning and Participation Officer: clare.bromley@westberks.gov.uk
Location of Bronze Age features in Berkshire	Details of Bronze 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 . Bronze 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 Bronze 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 Bronze Age 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 *Available to handle at school	Bronze 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 collection service is suspended due to COVID restrictions: all boxes must be collected/returned by a	Learning Team: Museum.education@reading.gov.uk

*Available to handle at another location. *Loan boxes	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. https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/blog/ Downloadable teachers pack available as part of our “Prehistory” Virtual Session. (see “Artefacts” section)	Learning Team: Museum.education@reading.gov.uk
Further information	Details of Reading Museum Learning Services can be found here:	Learning Team:

available on website	https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/schools	Museum.education@reading.gov.uk
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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/>

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

- The Bronze Age barrows listed below can be visited:
- Bill Hill, Bracknell
- Lambourn Seven Barrows, West Berkshire. (OS map reference GR SU 328828)
- Holdens Barrow cemetery, Mortimer Common (OS map reference GR SU 643651) – a group of Bronze Age barrows

Butser Ancient farm has a reconstruction of an Iron Age house and buildings from other ages

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