



STAR CARR HEADRESS
c.9000 BC
MESOLITHIC

Excavations along the edge of what was once Lake Flixton have revealed three timber platforms and traces of houses. Among the evidence of a rich material culture of stone, bone and wood were more than 30 frontlets of red deer. All had been extensively worked, with the antlers trimmed, and some had holes cut through the skull. These strange items were probably masks or some kind of headdresses. They might have been used as a disguise in hunting or during ritual performances in which people took the place of an animal. Such garments may have been worn by shamans when communicating with animal spirits.



SKARA BRAE VILLAGE
c.3100–2500 BC
NEOLITHIC

Fierce storms in 1850 stripped away sand dunes to reveal traces of stone-walled houses. Subsequent excavations uncovered ten structures arranged on either side of a subterranean alleyway. Each house is roughly square in plan with a single entrance, a central hearth, a dresser opposite the door and bed-boxes and storage facilities. Some have cells built into the thick walls, perhaps privies or stores. The inhabitants used beautifully decorated Grooved Ware pottery and a wealth of other materials. Their diet was based on domesticated crops, wild plants, fish, seabirds and products from sheep, goats, pigs and cattle.



AVEBURY STONE CIRCLES
c.2500 BC
NEOLITHIC

Avebury is Britain's largest prehistoric ceremonial monument, defined by an bank 5m (16ft) high and a internal ditch originally 9m (29½ft) deep. Four entrances give access to the fairly flat central space which once contained three stone circles. The outer circle followed the edge of the ditch and comprised 98 pillars of unworked local sarsen stone. It surrounded the southern circle of 29 pillars, in the centre of which was a large standing stone, and the northern circle of 27 pillars. Inside the northern circle was a massive 'cove' comprising three uprights forming the sides of a box-like structure open to the northeast.



GRIME'S GRAVES FLINT MINES
c.2500 BC | NEOLITHIC

Flint was crucial for making edged tools and weapons in prehistory, with the best flint being obtained from mines in the chalklands of southeastern Britain. Shafts up to 6m (nearly 20ft) across were dug to reach bands of good-quality flint. Radiating galleries then followed the seams of flint. At Grime's Graves, around 600 shafts are currently known, some up to 14m (46ft) deep. The earliest workings date to before 3000 BC, with use of the site continuing through to about 1900 BC. Each shaft required the removal of about 1000 tons of chalk and overburden to obtain around eight tons of flint.



MOLD CAPE
c.1900–1600 BC
BRONZE AGE

Made by hammering out a 700g (1½ lb) ingot of gold, this dazzling object formed the upper part of an elaborate but restrictive garment. It was found by workmen in 1833, and contemporary accounts suggest that it covered the remains of an inhumation burial in a stone-lined cist. Pieces of bronze, two gold straps (perhaps pieces cut from a second cape) and traces of cloth were all that remained from the rest of the garment. The craftsmanship displayed is exceptional: three zones of repoussé decoration formed of concentric lines of ribs and bosses mimic multiple strings of beads and the folds of cloth.



DRUMBEST HORNS
c.800 BC
BRONZE AGE

Four cast bronze horns were found in a bog in 1840, originally perhaps offerings to the gods of the underworld. When played like an Australian didgeridoo, these instruments would have made deep resonating sounds. Two of the horns were side-blown and could have provided a backing drone; the other two were end-blown through a cast-on mouthpiece and could have carried a melody. Rings would have held straps to support the instruments while being played in public rituals, battles or during raids. More than 100 horns are known from over 50 find-spots across Ireland.



MAIDEN CASTLE HILL FORT
c.400 BC | IRON AGE

Occupation spanning four millennia has been revealed by excavations on this hilltop. The great multivallate hill fort whose earthworks dominate the site today was built around 400 BC, enclosing 19ha (47 acres) – the largest hill fort of its type in Britain. Three concentric ramparts follow the contour of the hill. Entrances at either end have strengthened defences. Timber gate-towers and palisades along the top of the ramparts provided extra security. The great depth to the defences was necessary because sling warfare was common at the time. Numerous round houses and associated storage facilities lay inside.



BATTERSEA SHIELD
c.350–50 BC
IRON AGE

A masterpiece of artistry and metalworking, this shield was found in the bed of the River Thames in the 1850s. Only the bronze metal face survives; originally it would have had a wooden backing. The metal part of the shield was made using four sheets of bronze and three circular decorative panels. They were joined together with rivets and enclosed by an edge-binding. The panels are made from thin beaten sheet bronze, decorated with repoussé, engraving and red-enamel inlay. The designs are Celtic in style, comprising interlocking circles and spirals connected by S-shaped curves.

A N C I E N T B R I T A I N

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