

# Prehistory glossary

**archaeology** The study of human past through the investigation and examination of surviving evidence, such as artefacts.

**artefact** Object made or modified by human hands.

**barrow** Large mound of earth, often built to mark where people are buried.

**Beaker Culture** Describes a group of people who migrated from Europe and introduced the first metal objects made from copper and gold to Britain. They also brought a distinctive type of drinking vessels called beakers with them. This time is also called the Chalcolithic (Copper Age) and falls over the end of the Neolithic and the beginning of the Bronze Age. 2,450 – 2,150 BCE

**Bronze Age** Period of time during which bronze metal working was introduced. 2,600 – 700 BCE

**cursus** An elongated, oval-shaped earthwork. Assumed to be used in ceremonies or as landscape boundaries. Remains of a cursus were found at Heathrow Terminal 5.

**druid** Roman name for an Iron Age spiritual leader. Druids could be either male or female.

**experimental archaeology** Field of study which tests archaeological theories by 'doing'. One of the main forms of experimental archaeology is the creation of copies of historical structures and objects using historically accurate technologies and methods.

**flint** Hard, sedimentary rock used throughout prehistory to create a wide range of tools such as arrowheads, daggers and axes.

**fossil** The remains or impression of a prehistoric plant or animal embedded in rock and preserved in petrified form.

**henge** Enclosure characterised by a bank and ditch. Famous examples are Avebury and the Ring of Brodgar. They are sometimes marked by standing stones.

**hill fort** Hilltop settlements constructed predominantly in the Iron Age. Examples include Ambresbury Banks in Epping Forest and Maiden Castle in Dorset.

**Homo sapiens** The species to which all modern human beings belong.

**hunter gatherer** Communities of people who lived a mobile life hunting wild animals, catching fish and gathering fruit, nuts, mushrooms and plants.



Flint arrowhead

# Prehistory glossary

**Iron Age** Period of time during which iron metalworking began. This period includes the Roman invasion in 43 CE. Iron Age life continued alongside Roman society. 800 BCE – 100 CE.

**knapping** The art of creating tools by shaping flint.

**land bridge** A strip of land connecting two landmasses. Britain was connected to the rest of Europe via a land bridge until around 7,000 BCE. A warming climate caused sea levels to rise which flooded the land and made Britain an island.

**Mesolithic** The Middle Stone Age. A period of time in which the climate warmed and the landscape became forested. People were hunter gatherers and made sophisticated tools such as bows and arrows to hunt small game. 10,000 – 4,000 BCE

**Neanderthal** An ancient species of humans that lived across Europe and Britain 120,000 – 35,000 years ago. They lived alongside Homo sapiens.

**Neolithic** New Stone Age. A period of time when people migrated from Europe and settled in Britain. They brought a new way of life – farming, domesticated animals (cows, pigs, sheep and goats) and new technology – pottery. 4,000 – 2,200 BCE

**Palaeolithic** Old Stone Age. A period of time in which people lived a hunter gatherer lifestyle. They used tools made from flint, bone and wood. They moved through the landscape following migrating herds and making use of local resources. They adapted to large changes in climate. 1 million years ago – 10,000 BCE. The first humans lived in the London area around 400,000 BCE.

**prehistory** The time before written records. Prehistory does not occur simultaneously across the world. In Britain the prehistoric period ends in 43 CE with the Roman invasion and the first written records.

**smelting** Heating rocks to extract metals contained within them.

**torc** Iron Age jewellery, a neck ring made of twisted metal.



Bronze Age dagger,  
around 1,700 BCE

---

**Note on dates:** You might be more familiar with dates being written as 10,000 BC and 43 AD. This means Before Christ and Anno Domini (Year of the Lord). Today, archaeologists and historians don't use this system any more, but say BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) instead.