



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Glossary

Antiquarian: the term used for someone interested in antiquities or ancient places and objects. The term is often used to describe the people who studied ancient monuments in the days before archaeology emerged as a recognised discipline.

Antler pick: a tool made from the shed antlers of red deer, like a pick axe, used to break up the ground.

Aurochs: a very large, extinct type of cattle, found in Europe from about 250,000 years ago. They became extinct in Britain in the Bronze Age, but survived longer in Eastern Europe, the last recorded aurochs died in Poland in the seventeenth century. Over 1.7m tall, they were very aggressive and would have been a formidable prey for the Mesolithic hunters.

Awl: a sharp pointed tool, usually made from flint or metal, used to pierce holes, particularly in leather.

Bronze Age: c.2200 – 700 BC. The Bronze Age is the time when copper and bronze were first used.

Causewayed enclosure: a large central area surrounded by a series of discontinuous ditches and banks. It is the spaces between the ditches and banks that give causewayed enclosures their name. They date from about 3700BC.

Coppicing: a traditional method of woodland management in which young tree stems are cut down to near ground level so that the many new shoots can be harvested in subsequent growth years.

Earthworks: man-made mounds and hollows in the landscape. They can range in size from a few centimetres to the height of Silbury Hill, and in date from the Neolithic period to the present.

Enclosure: the term used for any area of land separated from surrounding land by earthworks, walls or fencing. Enclosures are one of the most common types of archaeological site.

Henge: a nearly circular or oval-shaped flat area that is usually surrounded by a bank and ditch. Henges vary a great deal. They can have one or more entrances, and additional circles of stone and timber were sometimes constructed inside (as at Avebury). They date from the early Neolithic period. A 'classic' henge, like Avebury, has the ditch on the inside. This suggests that henges were for ceremonies, not for defence.

Hillfort: an Iron Age (c.700BC – 43AD) fort or camp. They were usually built on high ground, or at a territorial boundary. Some were also settlements, whilst others were used only seasonally or in times of emergency.

Iron Age: c.700BC – AD43. The Iron Age is characterised by the first use of iron, though bronze continued to be used in the early part of the Iron Age.

Long barrow: a Neolithic (c.4000 – 2200BC) communal tomb. They are elongated mounds of earth, or chalk and earth, covering a wooden or stone 'house' for the dead.



Glossary

Mesolithic: Middle Stone Age (meso = middle, lithic = stone) c.8500 – 4000 BC. Rising sea levels separated Britain from the continent. Small groups of people lived a nomadic life, fishing, gathering wild food and hunting animals.

Neolithic: New Stone Age, neo = new, lithic = stone c.4000 – 2200 BC. When people first began to clear the forests and farm the land in Britain.

Palaeolithic: Old Stone Age (palaeo = old, lithic = stone) c. 750,000 – 10,000 BC. Flint tools and fragments of bone are evidence of the first known inhabitants of Britain.

Palisaded enclosure: an enclosure surrounded by a single or double row of close-set wooden stakes.

Prehistoric: the period before written history.

Radiocarbon dating: a method of dating organic material based on the amount of carbon 14 (a radioactive isotope of carbon) left in the sample. While an organism is alive, the amount of carbon 14 is steady, but after death it decays at a known rate, so the age of the sample can be calculated by the amount of carbon 14 that remains.

Ridgeway: an ancient trackway described as Britain's oldest road. It follows the chalk hills from Overton Down, near Avebury, to Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire - a distance of 137km (85 miles). The route has been in use since the Neolithic period (c. 4000 – 2200 BC).

Sarsen: a type of sandstone with quartz grains formed when groundwater became saturated with silica. They are about 30-35 million years old. The name either comes from 'saracen' implying foreign or alien, or from 'sar stan' meaning 'troublesome stone' in Old English.

Scapula: the shoulder blade of a large animal, such as an ox or horse, which could be used like a shovel.

Stone axe: although flint produced a sharper tool, stone axes were not so easily blunted or so liable to break. The stone was quarried from as far away as the Lake District, Cornwall and even the continent. The axes were usually traded as finished articles. Some were exchanged as 'rough-outs' that would still need to be polished, for example on the sarsen that was later incorporated in the stone chambers of the West Kennet Long Barrow.

Strike a light: a flint or metal object that could be struck to produce a spark for a fire.