

Cambridge Settlements: Teachers' Notes

Prehistory: Stone Age to Iron Age

While the Stone Age in Britain lasted for thousands of years, things didn't stay the same. At times the weather was really, really cold, too cold for people to live in Britain, which at this time wasn't an island but was connected to mainland Europe. You could walk from East Anglia across to the Netherlands!

The early Stone Age is called the **Palaeolithic** or **Old Stone Age**. People hunted mammoths and bison, following herds of large grazing animals and killing them with stone axes and stone tipped wooden spears. Slowly, as the weather changed and Britain got warmer, the snow began to disappear and woodland replaced tundra. As the snow melted, the seas began to rise and the land between Britain and Europe disappeared under water. As the environment changed so did the range of animals and plants. Gone were the mammoths and large bison, replaced by wild pigs, deer and wolves.

The people living in Britain still moved around the countryside hunting wild animals, but they also spent more time gathering berries, nuts and other edible wild plants. They used smaller flint tools - which we call microliths - and lived in tents made of wooden poles and animal skins. This time was known as the **Mesolithic** or **Middle Stone Age**.

The biggest and most influential changes to occur during the Stone Age happened during the **Neolithic**, or the **New Stone Age**. For the first time people started to plant crops of wheat and keep domesticated animals such as goats and cattle. Though they still moved around, they began to spend more and more time in one place. This was also the first time that people began to make pottery. They continued using flint and stone to make tools such as axes, which they used to clear the woodland so they could plant crops and graze their livestock.

It was during the **Bronze Age** that people first learnt how to make metal objects in Britain. This was a time when communities grew bigger and conflict between them increased. There were lots of small settlements across Cambridge and bronze axes are still being uncovered by farmers and metal detectorists today. People buried their dead in large burial mounds made of earth, many of which can still be seen in Cambridgeshire.

In the **Iron Age** people continued farming, but now had access to much stronger iron tools. They could also make stronger iron weapons and the trade in goods increased. There were more conflicts between local groups, and larger tribal groups formed to protect one another. This was also a time when people began building hillforts – such as Wandlebury - to show their power and status, and for protection.

Roman Cambridge

The Roman Empire was very large and covered many different countries. The Romans who invaded and settled in Britain in AD43 weren't necessarily from Rome in Italy, they could have come from anywhere in the Roman Empire. They introduced Roman laws, Roman architecture and Roman ways of living. If you accepted Roman rule, life could be good, but if you didn't accept it, life could be difficult and resistance was crushed by the mighty Roman army.

Briefly discuss how **Boudicca**, who led the East Anglian Iceni tribe, had several battles with the Romans until she was finally defeated.

In Roman times, Cambridge was still just a scatter of farms and small settlements and was renamed **Duroliponte**. Once, an important Roman road passed through what is now Arbury, and it was here that archaeologists found evidence of a large Roman villa. They also found some Roman coffins, one of which was made of stone, lined with lead and contained the remains of a woman in her 40s.

After 400 years of ruling Britain, the Roman Empire began struggling to keep rule over its vast empire. The decision was made to leave Britain and let the people take care of themselves. This time became known as the Dark Ages because historians used to think that nothing really important happened after the Romans left, but this really wasn't the case because this is the time when Angles, Saxons and Jutes began settling in Britain.

Early Medieval Cambridge: Angles, Saxons and Jutes

Angles, Saxons and Jutes began arriving in Britain shortly after the Romans left around 5th century AD. Archaeologists and historians aren't sure whether they invaded Britain or were invited to help the Romano-Britains fight off the Scots and the Picts from the north. Either way, they arrived from Denmark, the Netherlands, and Germany around 1500 years ago, settled and began farming. There were scattered settlements across Cambridgeshire, which had now become part of the Kingdom of Mercia.

In 2011, archaeologists excavating in Trumpington made a very important discovery. They found evidence of a large wooden Early Medieval hall which was once part of a small village where people had grown crops, kept chickens, raised sheep, spun wool and played games. On the edge of the village archaeologists discovered a small cemetery where a girl of around 16 years of age had been buried lying on a wooden bed. A gold cross inlaid with garnets from Asia had been placed on her body along with two gold and garnet pins. Some archaeologists believe she could have been an early Christian.

Vikings

The first Vikings to arrive in Britain came to steal precious objects, usually from Early Medieval churches. Eventually, some Vikings settled in Britain and some even made it to Cambridge. It's a myth that all Vikings wore helmets with large horns. While one or two are known, most Vikings probably didn't even wear a helmet.

Normans and Medieval Cambridge

Two years after the Norman Invasion of 1066 by a French Duke, soon to become known as William the Conqueror, a timber castle was built on the site of a former Early Medieval settlement - which we know now as Castle Hill. The castle was later built in stone but was never really an important building. Later, it was used for many years as a prison. Cambridge was still a small trading town and not really very important. However, that was soon to change when scholars from Oxford University settled here and began teaching around 1209. As time went by, more scholars came to teach at the university which grew in size and importance. Different colleges emerged to cater for the increasing numbers of students needing to live somewhere while studying. Many beautiful buildings have been built over the years and many famous people have attended the university.