**Introduction**

‘Celts’ is a word with many meanings, which has changed through time. Around 500BC ancient Greek historians used the word ‘Celts’ to describe barbarians, or wild people, north of the Mediterranean world. Today ‘Celtic’ it is primarily used to describe cultures and languages around the Atlantic edges of Europe – Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and areas of France.

It is important to remember that there has never been a single group of Celtic people, or a country of ‘Celts’. This exhibition will explore Celtic art and its varying styles through objects, examining cultures, belief systems and connections throughout a changing Europe.

The exhibition can be used to help classes understand the way in which we use objects to investigate past places and people and their languages and culture.

Through the impressive range of jewellery and metalwork on display, classes can also study the changing styles of Celtic art and the skills and techniques used to make it.

**Preparing for your visit:**

- Please note no food or drink are permitted in the exhibition
- Please note no pens or pencils are allowed within the exhibition
- Please note there is no photography permitted within the exhibition
- We recommend that classes are split into smaller groups prior to entering the exhibition (e.g. 8 pupils or less per group)
Look out for **Blewog the boar** as you explore the exhibition.

We’ve included his trail content below, along with extra background information and questions about the 10 key objects and displays he will introduce you to. You can also find out more about some of the topics on the touchscreens around the exhibition, with short films, and photographs you can explore in detail.

You can ask your pupils to look out for the boar to help you find the objects, or you can use the map and directions provided.

**Before your visit:**

**Discuss**

What do you know about ‘Celts’? What does the word ‘Celtic’ mean to you?

Ask each group to find an object that they think has an impressive design. Can they explain what they think the design might imply – strength, deities, influence, battles?
Area 1: Who were the Celts?

Object: Holzgerlingen statue
Find this standing in front of you as you enter the exhibition.

Supernatural statue

We think this mysterious stone statue may represent a god, whose name and stories are now lost. The people who made it 2500 years ago thought about the world in very different ways to us.

What stories do you think the statue could tell us about the way people lived?

This statue comes from south-west Germany. Stone statues in human form were rare in Iron Age Europe. Some probably marked the graves of prominent people, but the supernatural features on this statue, having two sides and leaves growing from its head, suggests that it represents a god rather than a human.

Why do you think the statue has leaves growing from its head? Why might it have two faces?

What do you think the leaves might symbolise? See how many other nature inspired designs you can find in the exhibition.
Area 2: A connected Europe, 450–150BC

Objects: Waldalgasheim burial
*Find the case with this jug in the next section of the exhibition.*

Beyond the grave

This collection of expensive objects was buried with a woman more than 2300 years ago. They include pieces of jewellery, feasting equipment and even a decorated chariot.

*Who do you think she was?*

*Why do you think these objects were buried with her?*

This incredible burial from western Germany dates from around 320BC. Some of the objects were made locally, but others came from further afield and show that people had connections with other societies and traded across long distances.

*Based on the objects this woman was buried with consider who she might have been? What role might she have played in society?*

*Look at her jewellery alongside the other objects. What similarities can you see between the different objects?*
Objects: Blair Drummond hoard
Find these in the case on your left hand side

Buried treasure

David Booth uncovered this amazing group of gold torcs in Blair Drummond on his very first adventure with his metal detector. Before he set out, he did some local history research to help him decide where to start looking.

*Listen to David telling his story, and explore the torcs in more detail, on the touchscreen on your right.*

Just like today, appearance and adornment said a lot about a person – their age, gender, status, where they came from and who they wanted to be. Jewellery such as brooches and neck rings, known as torcs, was often highly decorated and were worn by both men and woman.

This group of torcs was found in Scotland in 2009 and dates from between 300-100BC. David Booth found them whilst trying out his metal detector for the first time. It was only when he got in touch with experts from the museum that it became clear what an amazing find this was.

*How do you think David Booth felt when he found the torcs buried in a field? What do you think they would be like to wear?*

*Who might they have belonged to? Why do you think they might have been deliberately buried?*
A ferocious war cry

A carnyx was a horn used in battle to inspire warriors and scare the enemy. 200 years ago the head of a carnyx was found in Scotland. Ancient images showing the instruments being played helped modern experts create a copy.

Listen to it being played on the touchscreen below.

Why do you think the head is shaped like a wild boar?

The carnyx could have sounded like a boar as well as looking like one. It was described by ancient authors as making a ‘terrifying wall of noise’ during battle. But it could also make much more subtle music.

The carnyx was widely used across Europe. One of the films on the touchscreen includes a very different style of carnyx, which comes from France, being played.

Imagine you are in battle, what would hearing the carnyx make you feel? Why?

Why do you think this carnyx was shaped like a boar? Which other animals might make good carnyces?

What musical instruments do soldiers play today?
Object: Newbridge chariot (replica)
Find this in the middle of the room.

Riding in style

Imagine travelling in this chariot – do you think it would have been a comfortable journey? It would have been drawn by two ponies – perhaps they wore fancy bronze caps like the one in the case nearby.

Find out more about the chariot and the Torrs pony cap on the touchscreen.

This replica is based on a chariot found at a burial site in Newbridge, just west of Edinburgh, in 2001. It is Scotland’s only known chariot burial.

Powerful people liked to travel in style. A chariot pulled by two ponies was an impressive way of getting around at a time when most people had to travel on foot. Some were fast, light vehicles intended for use in battle or for showing off, like a modern sports car. Others were more sedate, for times when the journey was as important as the destination. Chariots and ponies were often decorated to add to the impressive spectacle.

Who do you think might have ridden in the chariot? Why might someone have been buried with it?

What materials have been used to recreate this chariot and why? How did the museum find out what it would have looked like?

Watch the touchscreen beside the chariot to find these answers.
Object: Gundestrup cauldron
Find the label for the cauldron round the corner on your right.

Cooking up a story

The Gundestrup cauldron is like a graphic novel that tells tales of courage, danger and magic. Some scenes feature objects you can see nearby, like characters wearing torcs around their necks or playing the carnyx.

Choose a panel from the cauldron on the touchscreen below.

What story do you think it tells?

This magnificent silver cauldron is one of the most important objects of its time. It was found in a bog in Denmark, but was made a long way away in south-east Europe. This is the first time it has ever been on display in Scotland.

Once you’ve explored the touchscreen about the cauldron, go and find the real thing.

This cauldron shows us evidence of a connected world, not just a Celtic one. There are scenes of western European images featuring objects like torcs and the carnyx but some panels show Asian influences (artistic impressions of elephants and people with antlers in yoga positions).

Which is your favourite part? Don’t forget to look inside the cauldron as well as outside. What do you think the cauldron was used for and who by? What story do you think the panels might be trying to tell?

Consider the materials used and the tools that would have been available at the time. How do you think they made the cauldron?
AREA 3: The impact of Rome, 200BC–AD250

Objects: Iron Age zoo
*Find these past the cauldron in the large case against the wall*

Strange beasts

Animals often featured in Celtic art and stories. Some animals were an everyday part of people’s lives, but they also represented human qualities like strength, bravery or speed.

*How many different animals can you spot in this case?*

*Which is your favourite?*

As the Roman Empire spread west they brought their art with them. Some Celtic art started to look more realistic to match Roman styles, like these objects with animals and people on them.

*What human qualities do you think the different animals (boars, horses, birds, snakes, cows and bulls) represented?*

*Which animal would you choose to decorate your helmet?*
Area 4: A new Christian world, AD250–1000

Object: Ogam stone

Find this in the next section on your right hand side

Crack the code

This carved stone, found in Wales, shows two languages with different alphabets being used side by side – Roman Latin and Irish Ogam.

Can you use the key on the blue panel to your right to read these Ogam letters from bottom to top?

By this time the Romans had left Britain. Inscriptions carved on stones in the early medieval period give us some of the best evidence for the various Celtic languages that were spoken in Britain and Ireland at this time. Different writing systems, or scripts, were used in different areas.

Latin script carved onto stones in Wales and western Britain was carried over from Roman times. The Ogam script was invented to communicate the sounds of the Irish language. Ogam was most popular in southern Ireland, but examples found further afield, particularly in south-west Britain, demonstrate the movements of Irish-speaking groups.

In north-east Scotland the Picts invented their own method of carved communication, using a system of paired symbols that incorporated the swirls and spiral motifs popular in metalwork of the time.

Imagine carving messages in stone. Which do you think would be easier – Latin letters, Ogam lines or Pictish swirls? What other written languages can you think of that use pictures?
Object: Hunterston brooch
*Find this in the case in the centre of the room*

![Hunterston brooch](front view) ![Hunterston brooch](rear view)

**Showing off**

The Hunterston brooch is one of the grandest treasures of its time. It was made by very skilled craft workers from silver, gold and precious stones, and was worn by different important people over several hundred years.

*Discover the brooch’s hidden beasts on the touchscreen below.*

*Can you find the secret writing on the back of the brooch?*

This brooch showed everyone how important its owner was. The brooch was found in Scotland but has aspects of Irish and Anglo-Saxon design too. On the back it also has a Gaelic name carved in Scandinavian runes (the written language of the Vikings).

*What might all the different materials and techniques used in this design tell us about the brooch’s original owner?*
Section 5: Rediscovery and revival, AD1500–today

Objects: *Anima Celtica* painting and related objects

Treasure hunt

John Duncan painted this ‘Celtic’ picture almost one hundred years ago. It shows scenes from Gaelic myths and stories, and lots of real objects, but only a few of them come from the time periods you’ve been exploring in this exhibition.

*Can you match the museum objects in the case with the ones in the painting?*

In the 19th century, Celtic Revival artists often had a romantic view of the Celtic past. They repurposed imagery, objects and stories from the past to create their own idea of the history and culture of their nation.

John Duncan created this image, *Anima Celtica* or Celtic Soul, in 1895 inspired by figures from Gaelic myths, along with a wide range of objects selected from illustrations in this museum’s 1892 catalogue. These included items ranging from a late Bronze Age sword to a Jacobite bonnet, almost 3000 years apart. So the earliest object came from before the beginning of ‘Celtic art’, some can be recognised as Celtic art, and others come from later times.

*Why might revival artists romanticise Celtic characters or history? Can you think of any ‘Celtic’ imagery that is used today and for what purpose?*

*If you have time, watch the short film on the wall beside the painting. Discuss: Who do you think the Celts were? Should we still perceive them as one group? Consider the objects and films you have seen in the exhibition covering geography, language, artwork and identity. These are questions you can return to back in class.*
### Other suggested activities

- Ask each group to choose their 3 favourite objects in the exhibition. What do these objects tell us about Celtic life, art and belief?
- Why not try and recreate the class’s favourite objects back in school?

### After your visit

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to the exhibition. There is still a lot to see and learn about Celts.

- Before you leave, visit our Early People gallery in the Scotland galleries (Level - 1) to find out more about early life in Scotland
- Discuss: What have you learnt from each of the sections in the exhibition? Has your opinion on Celts changed?

You can also explore some of the resources on our website [www.nms.ac.uk/celts](http://www.nms.ac.uk/celts)

- Watch a short ‘behind-the-scenes’ film exploring how we put the exhibition together with the British Museum
- Find further information about some of the objects in the exhibition

If you have any questions, comments or feedback, please get in touch with us. We’d also love to see any work your class produces after visiting the exhibition: schools@nms.ac.uk