Introduction

‘Celts’ is a word with many meanings, which has changed through time. Around 500BC ancient Greek historians used the word ‘Celts’ to describe what they saw as barbarians, or wild people, north of the Mediterranean world. Today ‘Celtic’ is mainly 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 changing styles through objects, looking at cultures, belief systems and connections throughout a changing Europe.

Preparing for your visit:

- Please note food or drinks are not permitted in the exhibition
- Please note pens and pencils are not permitted in the exhibition
- Please note there is no photography allowed in this 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?
Area 1: Who were the Celts?

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

![Holzgerlingen statue](image)

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?
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.

Look at the objects this woman was buried with. Think about – was she rich or poor? Do you think she was thought of as important?
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 decoration 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, were 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?
Objects: Deskford carnyx (replica and original)
Find this in the case behind you.

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 play tuneful 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.

Can you think of another animal which would make a good horn in battle?

Do you think you would be scared if you heard lots of warriors playing them together?
What musical instruments do soldiers play today?
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.

Do you think this would have been a fast chariot to show off in or a slower one? Can you find out what it is made from?
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 impressive 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.

Which is your favourite part of the cauldron?

What do you think the cauldron was used for and who by?
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 qualities (such as speed, knowledge, strength) do you think the different animals (boars, horses, birds, snakes, cows and bulls) represented?

Which animal would you choose to decorate your helmet and why?
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.

Can you think of any other languages that use pictures? Imagine having to hand carve every message you wrote, do you think ogam lines or Pictish swirls would be easier?
**Object: Hunterston brooch**

*Find this in the case in the centre of the room*

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).

*Who do you think might have worn this brooch?*

*Why do you think someone has carved their name on the back?*
Section 5: Rediscovery and revival, AD1500–today

Objects: Anima Celtica painting and related objects

Find the painting and related objects on the wall facing you in the final section of the exhibition

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, artists often had a romantic view of the Celtic past. They used 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, and a wide range of objects selected from drawings in this museum’s 1892 catalogue. These included items almost 3000 years apart in age, from a late Bronze Age sword (a time before the beginning of Celtic art) to a Jacobite dagger. Only the objects in between could be described as Celtic.

Where might you find Celtic patterns, symbols or stories today? (Jewellery and touristy gifts, Disney Pixar’s Brave, music, football strips?)
Other suggested activities

- Ask each group to choose their three favourite objects in the exhibition. Ask them to discuss why these are their favourites. Back in class why not try and recreate the class’s favourite objects?

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](mailto:schools@nms.ac.uk)