

Scotland's Early People handling collection



National
Museum of
Scotland

Scotland's Early People handling collection

Teachers notes

Welcome to the National Museum of Scotland.

Our Scotland's Early People handling collection contains 11 real artefacts from our collections and we encourage everyone to enjoy looking at and handling them to find out more.

This resource is linked to the Early People gallery and can be used as part of a visit to that gallery.

These notes include:

- Background information about the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age periods of Scotland's prehistory.
- Details about each artefact.
- Ideas for questions, things to think about and to discuss with your group.

NMS Good handling guide

The collection is used by lots of different groups so we'd like your help to keep the collection in good condition.

Please follow these guidelines for working with the artefacts and talk them through with your group.

- 1 Always wear gloves when handling the artefacts (provided)
- 2 Always hold artefacts over a table and hold them in two hands
- 3 Don't touch or point at artefacts with pencils, pens or other sharp objects
- 4 Check the artefacts at the start and the end of your session
- 5 Please report any missing or broken items using the enclosed form

Scotland's Early People handling collection

Scotland's Early People

- Scotland's early people lived in an era known as the prehistoric era.
- 'Prehistoric' means 'before recorded history'. It is a time before people in Scotland had started to write things down.
- Almost everything we know about Scotland's early people has been found out by researching the objects they left behind.
- To help us understand and talk about prehistory better, Archaeologists have divided the prehistoric era into five periods, each covering a very long time. This means that there were huge changes in life across the whole era.

Paleolithic (c450,000 - 10,000 BC)

Mesolithic (c10,000 - 4000 BC)

Neolithic (c4000 - 2500 BC)

Bronze Age (c2500 - 800 BC)

Iron Age (c800 BC - 80 AD)

- This is a useful way for us to think about time but it is worth remembering that people who were living in prehistoric times did not use these labels to talk about themselves.
- The objects in this resource date from the Neolithic period and the introduction of farming. They all come from Scotland.



Iron age farmer

Scotland's Early People handling collection

What can the objects left behind tell us about Scotland's early people?

- We know that Scotland's early people were clearly skilled in their use of the land's resources.
- They had to make do with material that could be sourced from the land around them.
- Items made of inorganic material such as stone and bone are the most likely to have survived over thousands of years. Items which were made from organic items such as animal skins and wool tend not to have survived for us to examine.
- Stone was used to make tools, weapons and jewellery as well as buildings and monuments.
- Animal skins and fabric woven from sheep and goat wool and also plant fibers were used for clothes and footwear.



Prehistoric clothing



Prehistoric jewellery

- Antler and bone were carved to make tools and jewellery.
- As people began to settle and farm the land, they developed skills in making pottery.
- New skills and knowledge came into the country from Europe as people travelled to trade or settle here. These skills included metal working and glassmaking.
- The objects that have survived show that people were resourceful, inventive, skilful and adaptable. Their tools, their weapons, their cooking utensils and jewellery provide glimpses of what life was like.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

Contents

Neolithic objects

1. Flint pebble core
2. Red, brown and white leaf shaped flint arrowheads (red)
3. Polished stone axehead
4. Pottery fragment

Bronze Age objects

5. Flint scraper
6. Bronze socketed axe

Iron Age objects

7. Hammerstone
8. Stone lamp
9. Glass arm-band fragment
10. Spindle whorl and replica spindle whorl

Roman objects

11. Iron nail

Scotland's Early People handling collection

The Neolithic period

Fab fact!

The most important change that took place during the Neolithic period was that people began to farm animals and plants rather than existing as hunter gatherers.

- The term Neolithic means 'new stone age'.
- The Neolithic period in Scotland lasted from around 4000 – 2500BC.
- Other introductions in this period were monument building e.g. standing stones and Henges and the use of pottery.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



What different colours can you see?

Touch



Compare the rough, grainy texture of the surface to the smooth, shiny faces of the core caused by chipping pieces off with another rock. The edges are still quite sharp.

Think



Why do you think flint was so good for making tools and arrowheads?



Neolithic objects

1. Flint pebble core

- *What is it?*
This is a piece of flint. Flint was used to make all kinds of tools including arrowheads.
- *What was it used for?*
Once as many pieces of flint as possible had been chipped off the core and then made into tools, the remaining part would have been thrown away.
- *How was it made?*
Flint splits into thin, sharp splinters called flakes or blades when struck with another hard object such as a hammerstone. This process is called 'knapping'.
- This piece dates from between 4000 and 3000BC.
- It could have come from anywhere in Scotland.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



The very small size of the arrowheads. They could still cause a lot of damage when fired, just like a small bullet can today. Why do you think Neolithic people would fight?

Touch



The smooth surfaces and sharp pointed edges. On the white arrowhead, you can feel the flat edge at the top where it would have been inserted into the shaft.

Think



Would similar arrowheads have been used to hunt animals when necessary? Or do you think they would have needed bigger ones when shooting animals like deer?



2. Leaf-shaped flint arrowheads

- *What is it?*
These are arrow heads that were fixed to the end of a wooden shaft and fired from a bow or thrown like a javelin.
- *What were they used for?*
These arrowheads would probably have been used for shooting other people! The Neolithic people didn't need to hunt much as they had domesticated animals. A similar arrowhead was once found in a human spine. This is on display in the Early People Gallery.
- *How were they made?*
They would be flaked from a flint core and the edges sharpened by chipping another piece of stone against them. They were 'glued' into a wooden shaft using sticky resin from trees.
- They all date from between 4000 and 3000BC.
- These types of arrowhead are often found in north east Scotland and Aberdeenshire. The palest one was found at Culbin Sands in Moray.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



The original scars from when it was flaked out of the rock.

Touch



The cutting edge - is it as sharp as modern metal axes?

Think



Imagine making your own tools before you could cut wood to make your house, furniture and burn on your fire to cook food. Do you think we take these things for granted today?



3. Polished stone axehead

- *What is it?*
This is an axehead with a sharp rounded edge and a rounded end (now broken) that would have been inserted into a hole in a wooden shaft.
- *What was it used for?*
It may have been used as a tool for cutting wood for building but its size and the fact it is polished means it may also have had a ceremonial purpose or been used as a status symbol.
- *How was it made?*
It would have been flaked out of a chunk of rock then ground against a block of sandstone with water to make it smooth – a bit like using sandpaper. The edges were squared off to help it sit in the wooden shaft.
- It is made from a type of rock called Group VI rock which comes from the Lake District. The stone was probably imported to Scotland.
- It dates from around 3000BC.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



The linear pattern on the top edge and outside of the fragment.

Touch



It is quite smooth and thin - not unlike bowls that we use today.

Think about



What do you think the complete bowl would have looked like? Do you think it would have been colourful and patterned like our bowls?



4. Pottery fragment

- *What is it?*
This is a fragment from the rim of a decorated pottery bowl.
- *What was it used for?*
The same purpose that we use bowls for - eating food and cooking.
- *How was it made?*
It would have been made by hand using local clay. The bowl would have been built up from a coil or slab of clay and the lines incised into it when it was still wet. It would then be fired in a bonfire pit.
- Pottery like this was made throughout the Neolithic period so we are not sure of the exact date of this piece.
- It is from a Neolithic settlement site at Eilean an Tighe, North Uist in the Western Isles.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

Fab fact!

Metal was introduced to Britain in the Bronze Age by traders and settlers from Europe.

The Bronze Age

- The Bronze Age lasted from roughly 2500BC – 800BC.
- In Britain, the earliest metalwork consists of simple copper artefacts which were made between 2500 and 2200BC. The working of Bronze began around 2200BC and lasted until around 800BC. This was the period that linked the Stone Age with the Iron Age.
- Stone tools were still used.
- It was during the Bronze Age that people began making textiles (fabric).
- Pottery and weapon making also became more sophisticated.
- The Bronze Age also saw the introduction of 'Barrows' (mounds of earth) as burial sites and the use of cremation for the dead. Finds from burials are one of our main sources of information about the Early Bronze Age.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



The two pieces of the surface stone that haven't been chipped off.

Touch



The smooth surface caused by erosion in the sand dunes where it was buried and the sharp scraping edge.

Think



Do you think that the introduction of metal during this period would have made life easier for people?



Bronze Age objects

5. Flint scraper

- *What is it?*
It is a scraping tool- similar to a modern knife
- *What was it used for?*
It was used for scraping wood to make shafts for weapons and tools and scraping animal skins and bark.
- *How was it made?*
It would have been struck off from a larger piece of flint and then chipped to make the scraping edge.
- It was found in the sand dunes at Luce Sands, Wigtownshire on the south east coast of Scotland.
- It dates from between 2500 and 1500BC .

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



Bronze is usually a shiny brown/gold colour – why is this green?

The bronze contains copper which turns green when it mixes with oxygen in the air.

Touch



Feel the weight of the axe- although it is small it is quite heavy. Do you think it would have been an effective cutting tool? Why did we not find the wooden handle?

The wood would not be preserved and would rot away over the years.

Think



The bronze was made using copper and tin from across Britain. This shows that people in Bronze Age Scotland traded across Britain and Europe and were not restricted to their own area.



6. Bronze socketed axe

- *What is it?*
It is the head of a 'Yorkshire type' axe.
- *What was it used for?*
It would have been used as a tool for cutting and shaping wood for all sorts of activities from house construction to boat building. It was probably not intended for use as a weapon. Although it was a tool, the person who made it put in the raised ribs as decoration.
- *How was it made?*
Bronze is a mixture of copper and tin. These would have been melted together in a furnace and then poured into a stone mould shaped like the axe head. Once the bronze was cool the axe head was taken out, polished and fitted into a wooden shaft. It was tied on with cord threaded through the small hole or 'socket'.
- We do not know exactly where it came from but this type of axe was common throughout Scotland.
- It dates from the late Bronze Age - between 1000 and 800BC.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

Fab fact!

The Iron Age lasted from roughly 800BC – 80AD and during this period it has been suggested that the population of Britain increased to over one million people.

The Iron Age

- By 800BC iron was replacing bronze as the main raw material for making tools and weapons. The use of iron spread throughout Britain from the continent.
- Although famous for the introduction of iron, the Iron Age saw many other technical innovations including the introduction of new crops and farming techniques, glass bead making and pottery wheels.
- Iron did not replace stone tools completely. At first iron was only used for ceremonial or ritual objects like swords. Later in the Iron Age people began making other objects out of iron.
- Most Iron Age people lived in 'roundhouses'. In areas where supplies of wood were widely available the houses were built of timber with thatched roofs. In areas like the Northern Isles where timber was scarce, stone buildings were common.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



The dents and chips on both ends where it was used to hammer things.

Touch



Hold the stone as if you were going to hammer something. The shape makes it easy to hold.

Think



Which do you think would have been easier for people to use – a hammerstone like this one or a new metal hammer fitted to a handle?



Iron Age objects

7. Hammerstone

- *What is it?*
It is a 'hammerstone' made from an elongated pebble.
- *What was it used for?*
It would have been used a bit like a modern hammer, but was just held in the user's hand – not fitted to a handle. While a modern hammer tends to be used to hit nails to fix and attach things, this would have been used for functions like breaking open bones to extract marrow and crushing metal ores.
- *How was it made?*
The pebble - which is very hard quartz rock - was probably collected from the beach. It would have been chosen because it was a good shape and could be used straight away.
- This hammerstone is part of a group of objects found in North Uist in the Western Isles.
- This hammerstone probably dates from between 500BC and 500AD but they were used over long periods of time so we can't be sure

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



Look at the shape of the lamp. How much oil do you think it would hold and how often would it have to be refilled? What would using a lamp like this involve in terms of preparation and cleaning?

Touch



Lift it by the handle - does it feel light or heavy? What would it be like to carry? You would have to be careful that you didn't drop it and spill the oil everywhere.

Think



Do you think lamps like this would have given off much light? Can you think of other types of light that might be similar?



8. Stone lamp

- *What is it?*
It is a lamp.
- *What was it used for?*
It was used to light a room. The bowl would have been filled with oil and a wick floated in the centre.
- *How was it made?*
It was carved from steatite stone. Steatite was easy to carve and did not crack with heat.
- Lamps like this were used throughout Scotland.
- It dates from between 200BC and 200AD.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



It is not transparent (see through) like most glass. This is because the metal was added to the melted glass to colour it white.

Touch



The slightly pointed outer edge - this was shaped when the glass was soft.

Think



Why would glass be such a status symbol? Can you work out how large the original bracelet would have been?



9. Glass bracelet fragment

- *What is it?*
It is a piece of a circular bracelet.
- *What was it used for?*
It is a piece of jewellery and would have been worn as a status symbol and to make the person wearing it look good. Glass was rare and this would have been owned by a rich or important person.
- *How was it made?*
People in Iron Age Britain did not have the technology or skills to make glass. This was probably made from imported Roman glass. The glass was melted down and then had metal added to it to give it the white colour. To make the arm band, a glob of melted glass was spun round a stick and then the edges shaped.
- It probably comes from Southern Scotland but we do not know exactly where it was discovered.
- It dates roughly from between 100 and 200 AD.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

See



The very thin, grooved lines around the edge of the whorl for decoration. Some whorls were very elaborate; others had no decoration at all.

Touch



Compare the smoothness of the whorl and the replica – which is smoother?

Think



Why do you think only the stone whorl remains?

The wooden spindle and wool would have decayed.



10. Spindle whorl and replica spindle whorl

- *What is it?*
A spindle whorl is the weight fixed to the bottom of a wooden spindle - the wooden stick used to spin wool into yarn.
- *What was it used for?*
The spindle was used for twisting wool into thread, which could be woven into fabric. The spindle was attached to a hank of raw wool and twisted by hand to lengthen and draw out the wool into a thread. The heavy whorl would have hung at the end of wool, to act as a weight and keep the spindle turning at a regular rate.
- *How was it made?*
The whorl was carved from stone and polished to make it turn more easily.
- The ring dates from the Iron Age but spindle whorls were used until relatively modern times.
- Spindle whorls have been found across Scotland.

Scotland's Early People handling collection

Fab fact!

The Romans were in Scotland for over 300 years from 80AD to 410AD

The Roman Period

- The Roman occupation signified the end of prehistoric Britain.

See



The nail is square unlike the nails we use today which are round.



Touch



The flat top where it has been hammered into the wood.

Think



If you were an Iron Age native, how would you have felt when the Romans invaded Scotland?

Roman objects

11. Iron nail

- *What is it?*
It is an extremely long nail! It is from a hoard over 1000 nails buried near the site of a Roman fort in Inchtuthil, Perthshire
- *What was it used for?*
It was probably made to hold together timber in a building, gate or bridge – it was found near the site of a Roman fort. When the Romans abandoned the fort they took the wood and buried the nails rather than leave them to fall into the hands of locals.
- *How was it made?*
Iron nails like this were made by blacksmiths who travelled with the Roman legions. They would smelt the iron ore then shape the nails by hand.
- It came from the site of a Roman fort at Inchtuthil, Perthshire.
- It dates from the 1st century AD when the Roman army first invaded Scotland.