

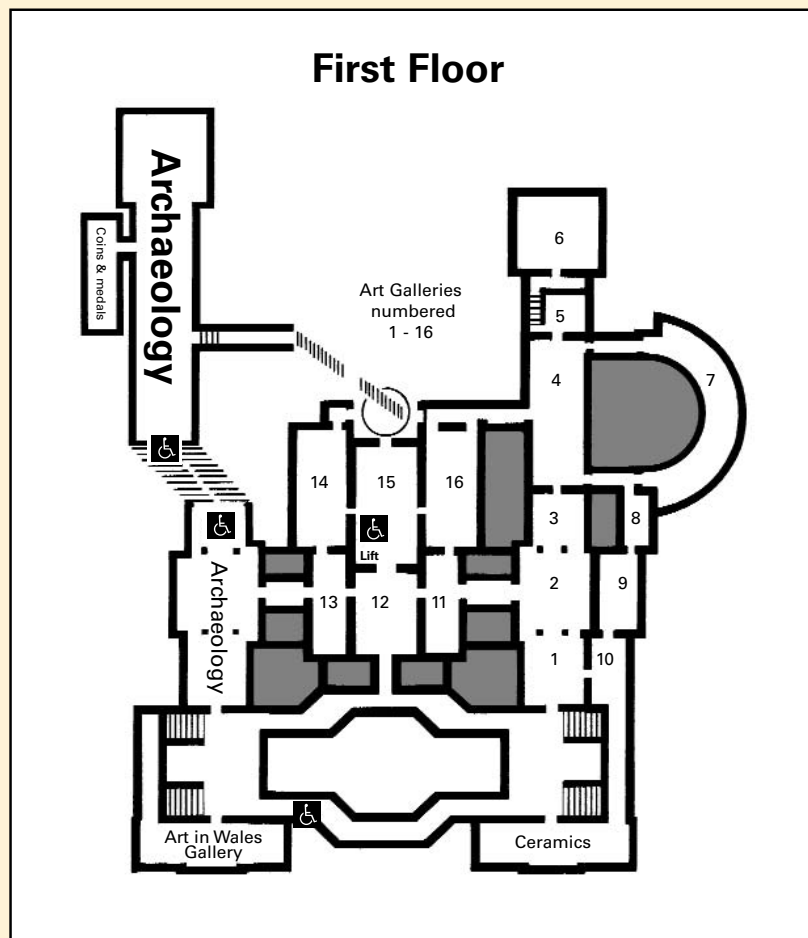
Archaeology Writing Trail

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Welcome to the writers' trail. It will direct you through part of the display in Archaeology (Stone Age to Iron Age) and hopefully inspire you with prompts and suggestions. The trail should take about one hour to complete.

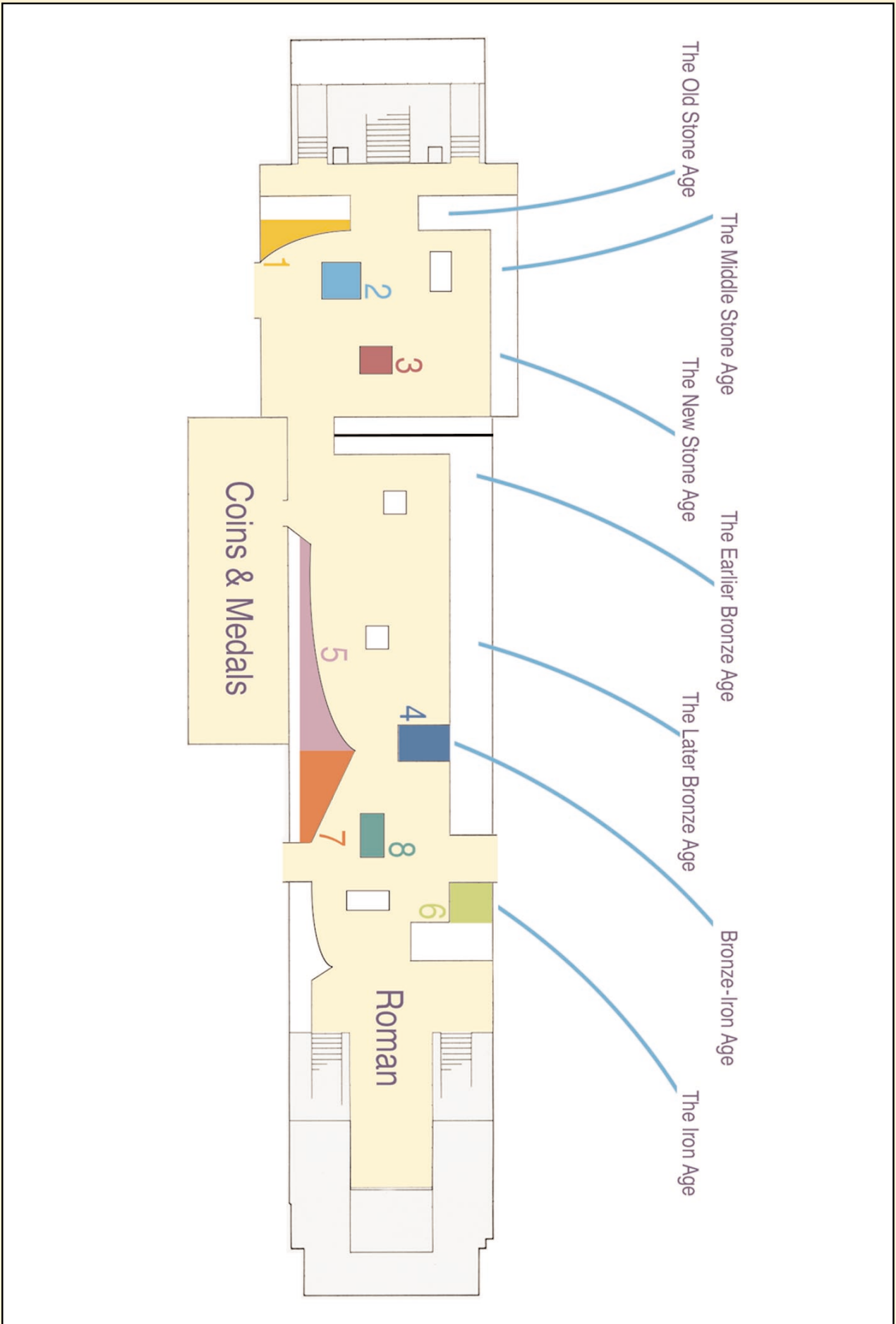
Start the trail in the Stone Age Gallery on the first floor. Look first at Case 1, which contains objects found at Pontnewydd Cave.

Please return the trail to Glanely Gallery when you have finished so that other people may use it. You can download your own copy of the trail free of charge from www.museumwales.ac.uk/learning, under Adult Learning.



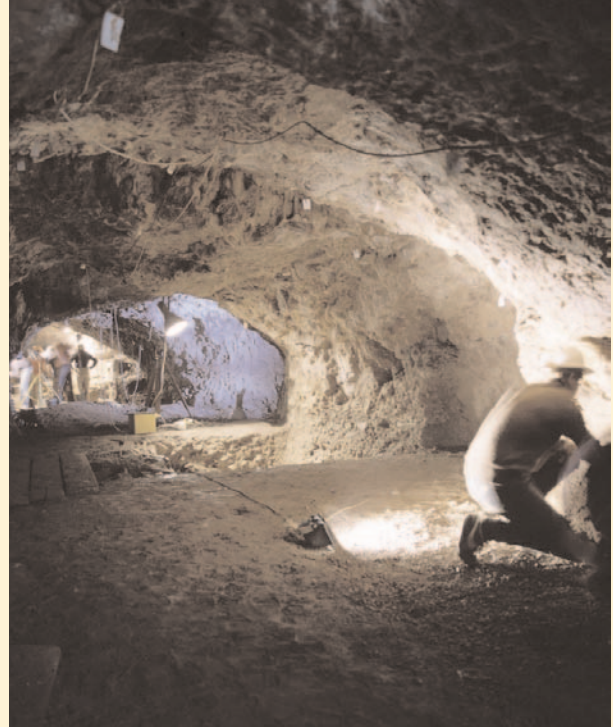
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Case 1: Pontnewydd Cave

Pontnewydd Cave in Denbighshire is famous for its early Neanderthal remains, the earliest known in the British Isles.



In Case 1 you can see stone hand-axes, human teeth and bone fragments from a quarter of a million years ago.

The teeth in this case belonged to two individuals, an adult and a child of about 8 years old.



- **What do you feel, looking at a child's milk tooth from this long ago? What's the first thing that you think of? The tooth fairy? Chipped teeth? Write down all the images that come to mind and your reactions.**

The discovery of stone tools, animal bones with cut marks as well as human teeth and bone fragments is proof that Pontnewydd Cave was used by humans about a quarter of a million years ago. The early Stone Age hunter-gatherers made tools including hand-axes, scrapers and simple spear-points from selected local stones, particularly volcanic rock transported by the ice from Snowdonia. Their prey might have included horse, rhinoceros, red deer and roe deer. Bones found in the cave are scratched and scraped, signs that animals were butchered.



“ *The oldest traces are not memories. Marks on a stone trace a hand. Ochre on bones trace an attended life. But these are few and far between... Before the last of the ice men and women had hunted this land. Between the advances of the ice there were long warm millennia, in which the highlands were forested, and before the final advance there were wide grasslands where herds of reindeer and bison and horse grazed and were hunted...*

People of the Black Mountains Raymond Williams (1989)

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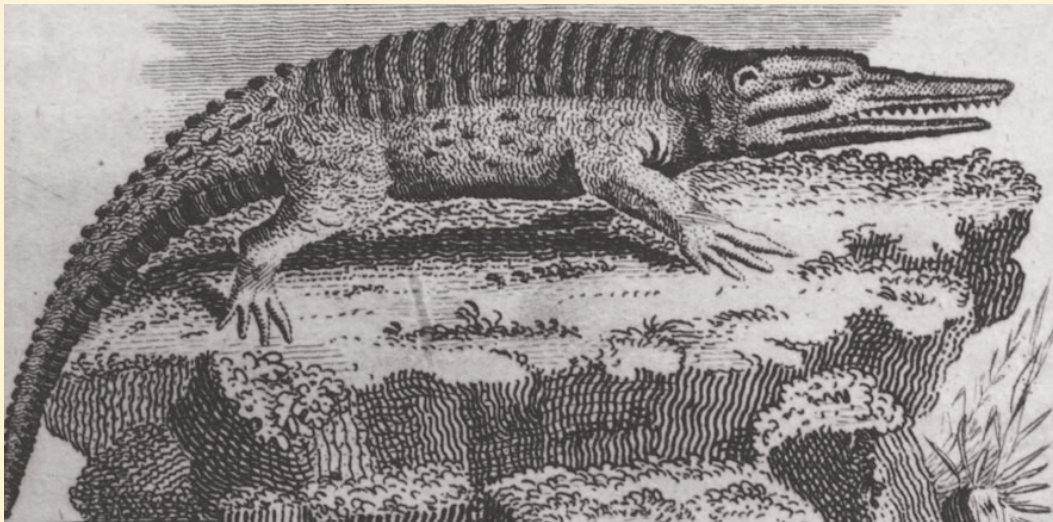
- **Imagine someone coming in off the busy city streets to look at the stone tools and bones retrieved from Pontnewydd Cave. Write in his or her voice, using contemporary sayings or slang. What do these objects mean to your 21st-century character? Do they inspire a rap, a blog or a song?**

Next to Case 1 you can read about 'The First Home in Wales'. Another story could be called:

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The Lost World of the Elwy Valley

It's the 1920s and a travelling fair visits St Asaph, Llanelwy. One of the show animals, a crocodile (or is it an alligator?) sadly dies. Two local boys are given the job of disposing of the specimen. What do they do? According to a native of Cefnmeiriadog, in his eighties when he recounted the tale some twenty years ago, they turn the dead beast into a source of income.



For decades, Cefn Caves have been a visitor attraction and our entrepreneurs decide to promote the concept of a 'Lost World of the Elwy Valley', by placing the deceased reptile in a side passage in the cave system. For a fee, locals and visitors alike are amazed to see such well-preserved evidence for life in the Stone Age. The scam is exposed only when the putrefying processes kick in and the experience becomes all too real ... which is when our business boys rebrand themselves as jokers.

”

after *Cofio'r Cefn* (1989 pp. 49-50) Kenneth Brassil, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

- **Write part of a newspaper report, quoting one of the boys, trying to capture his tone and using the words he would have used, explaining why he put the croc in the cave.**

Case 2: Bryn Celli Ddu

Now look behind you at Case 2 which contains a scale model of a circular burial tomb: Bryn Celli Ddu on Anglesey.

Common ideas about burial practice spread around the Atlantic coast of Europe 5,500 years ago, linking Brittany, Cornwall, Wales, southern Scotland and Ireland, and evident today in the remains of circular burial mounds. What makes them so special? An archaeologist explains:



Bryn Celli Ddu was built around 3000 BC, when Wales was still in the Stone Age. Its builders are almost entirely lost to us; what little remains of their lives is trapped in now-blunt flints and broken pots. Nevertheless, the alignment of this tomb is proof that the simplicity of their tools was no limit to their imagination or technical skill in building a stone observatory that still marks time, 250 generations on.

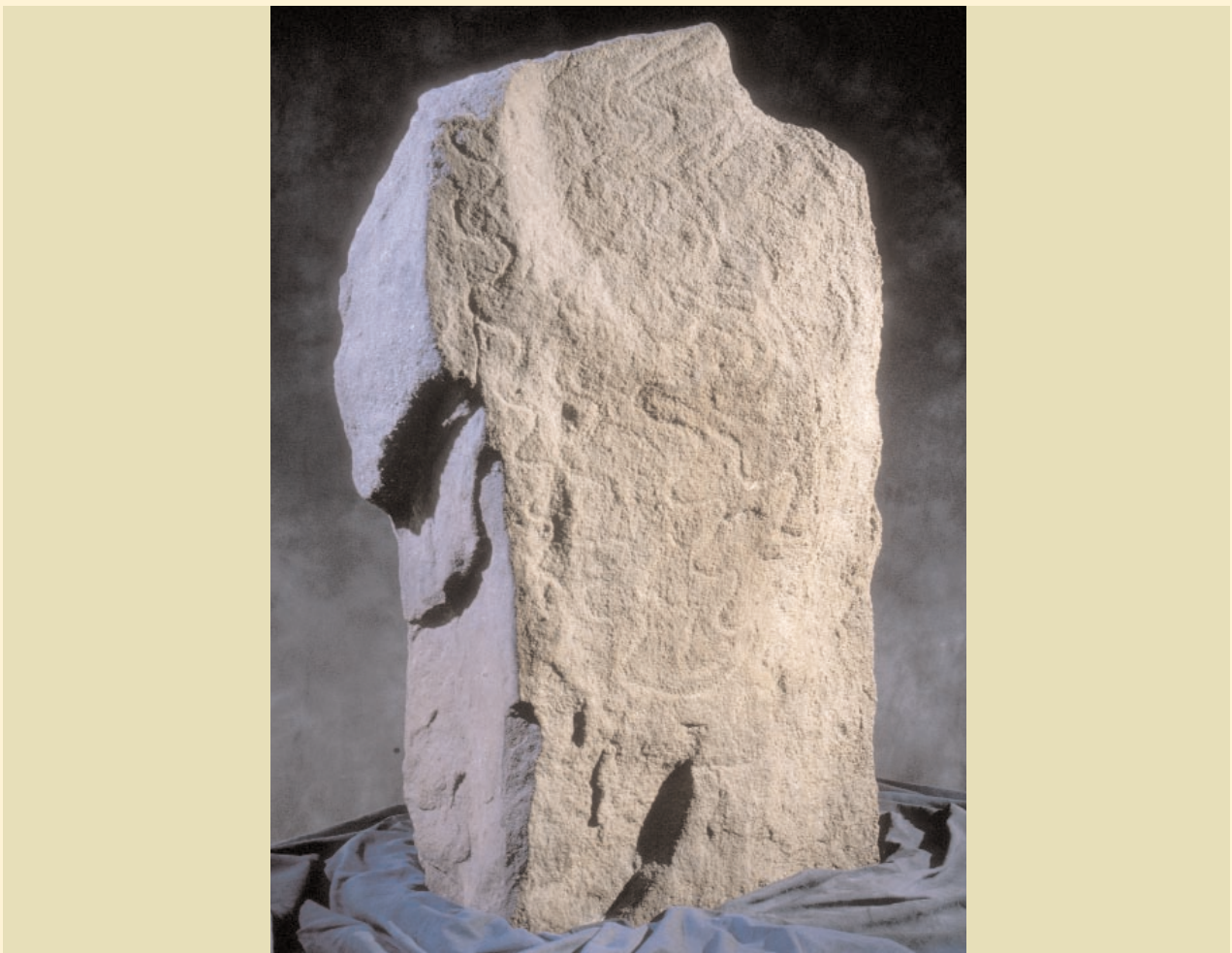
The seemingly makeshift passage of the tomb looks out on a featureless horizon. The same view could have been achieved by shifting the tomb a few degrees to the left or right; it is only at dawn on the midsummer solstice that its intentional alignment becomes apparent. At this moment, a beam of sunlight enters and fills the 5-metre passage, illuminating the rear wall of the chamber, as if breathing new life into the tomb.

Dr Steve Burrow, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

- **Write a poem (an ode?) or prose piece addressing the sun on the summer solstice, celebrating the significance of this particular day.**

Case 3: Bryn Celli Ddu

Now look at both sides of the patterned standing stone in Case 3. This stone was discovered lying face down behind the central chamber at Bryn Celli Ddu, where it must have been buried before tomb building began. Archaeologists are not sure whether it was buried in order to sanctify the site, or to hide the stone away. Look at the patterns on the stone. What might they represent? The illuminated frieze above you, called *Ritual in a Passage Grave, 3000 BC*, illustrates the positions of such stones in another Anglesey tomb and their possible function as part of a burial ritual.



- **Try to explain the significance of the markings on the stone in a poem or piece of prose. Do they represent a river, a labyrinth or maze, or a trail to be followed to enter the spirit world?**

Barclodiad y Gawres

Look again at the illustration called *Ritual in a Passage Grave, 3000 BC* showing the passage tomb at Barclodiad y Gawres, Anglesey, with its main chamber and three side-chambers in which the dead would have been placed. In the centre of the main chamber there was a fire, possibly lit to illuminate the walls during rituals. To the surprise of archaeologists excavating this site, they found a mix of reptile, fish and amphibian bones in the hearth.



*Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.'*

Macbeth William Shakespeare

- **Write a poem or short piece of prose, suggesting why the bones would have been found in the remains of the fire. What did each creature signify? Did they embody certain spirits? Did they have particular powers? What omens could have been associated with them? Superstitions? Spells?**

Case 4: Llyn Fawr

The next gallery displays objects from the Bronze Age and Iron Age.



Case 4 situated at the end of the gallery, displays objects recovered from Llyn Fawr, near Rhigos, Rhondda Cynon Taff, in 1911. The hoard, which includes bronze axes, gouges, a razor, horse-gear, an iron sword and two enormous cauldrons, was discovered when the lake floor was being deepened to make a reservoir. The iron sickle is one of the oldest native made objects of iron in Britain, and dates from about 800 to 600 BC.

In *The Spoils of Annwn*, accredited to the Welsh bard *Taliesin* (sixth century AD), a sacred vessel is described. A group of learned mystics enter Annwn, the Underworld, to find the 'Cauldron of Pwyll', reputed to possess magical powers including speech, inexhaustibility, inspiration and regeneration. Drops of liquid from the cauldron give a person the ability to see the past, the present and the future and also to change shape:

*...I have been a blue salmon,
I have been a dog, a stag, a roebuck on the mountain,
A stock, a spade, an axe in the hand,
A stallion, a bull, a buck,
I was reaped and placed in an oven;
I fell to the ground when I was being roasted
And a hen swallowed me.
For nine nights was I in her crop.
I have been dead, I have been alive.
I am Taliesin...*

Anonymous (Welsh, 13th century)

- Describe the shapes you would assume on receiving drops from the cauldron, and what you would do with your new-found powers.

Case 5: Bronze Age Hoard

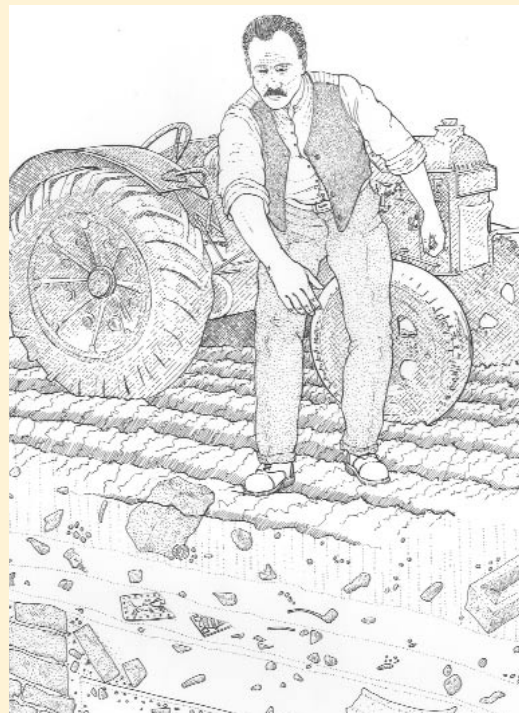
Now cross the Bronze-Iron Age Gallery to Case 5. It contains golden items from the Bronze Age, including the hoard of four gold bar torcs from Llanwrthwl, Powys.

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The four torcs were discovered in February 1954, in a field of rough pasture known as Cae-gwyllt Bank, belonging to Talwrn Farm, by two farm workers who were preparing the land for cultivation. 'Mr Smith was raising large stones before the plough, and came across one which was on its edge and weighed about 2 hundredweight. He called on Mr Davies for help in lifting it and found it rested on a heap of small stones. Under one of these stones he found two torcs, of unequal size, and underneath these was another small stone beneath which were two more torcs, also of unequal size. The two farm workers did not at first attach great importance to their find: as one said, at the Coroner's Inquest on Treasure Trove, the torcs, being dirty, "looked like old bed springs." But they later agreed to share the four mysterious objects between them, and it was only through Mr Smith's honesty in showing his two torcs to his employer that the discovery came to light...'

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The Late Bronze Age in Wales: Some New Discoveries and New Interpretations
H. N. Savory (1958)



- **Dramatise the story of this discovery, from the point of view of Mr Smith. Explain why he decided to give up the torcs. What were his feelings when he realised they were made of gold?**

Cases 6 & 7: Llyn Cerrig Bach

Now walk through the Iron Age Gallery, past the weaver to Case 6, which displays objects from the Llyn Cerrig Bach hoard, dating from 200 BC -AD 100. (More objects from Llyn Cerrig Bach can be seen in Case 7 on the other side of the gallery, in the display called 'Celtic Warrior'.)

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In 1942 peat was required in the preparation of the landing ground at the Royal Air Force Station, Valley on Anglesey and the group of bogs at Llyn Cerrig Bach provided an obvious source. It was during the peat dredging operation that an iron chain was caught up in the teeth of a harrow and, transferred to the tractor, was found useful for dragging on to firm ground lorries that had got stuck. The notice of Mr J. A. Jones, Resident Engineer of the Ministry of War Transport, was drawn to this discovery, and other metal objects, together with animal bones, were found by him and by workmen on the site.

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A Find of the Early Iron Age from Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey
Sir Cyril Fox (1946)



Despite wartime secrecy, *The Times* published a short report of the discoveries in 1944. Jacquetta Hawkes thought the crescentic bronze plaque...



...decorative genius at its most accomplished. It has an asymmetry, which is subtly balanced and succeeds in making the matrix of space as powerfully effective as the design itself. It is wholly abstract, yet there is some strange movement in it; simple to austerity, yet the curved surfaces of the repoussé work lend a certain voluptuousness.

Ruins

*And this was a civilization
That came to nothing – he spurned with his toe
The slave-coloured dust. We breathed it in
Thankfully, oxygen to our culture.*

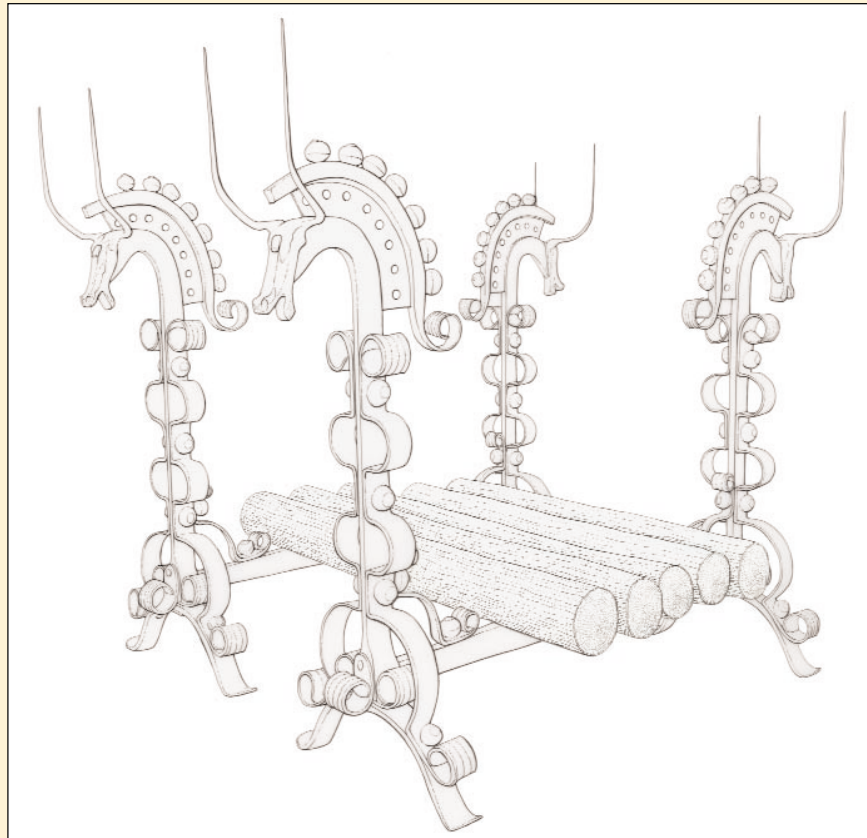
*Somebody found a curved bone
In the ruins. A king's probably,
He said. Imperfect courtiers
We eyed it, the dropped kerchief of time.*

From *H'm* R. S. Thomas (1972)

- **Write a poem or short prose piece about the objects found at Llyn Cerrig Bach. What do they tell us about a lost civilization?**

Case 8: Capel Garmon

Finally, look behind you at the Capel Garmon firedog in Case 8. A masterpiece from the first century AD, this iron stand with two horned animal heads was uncovered by a man digging a ditch through peat on Carreg Goedog Farm, Capel Garmon, Conwy in 1852. It would have been the central focus of an Iron Age roundhouse.



Iron smelting is a difficult, time-consuming and skilled operation. How did early metallurgists extract iron from its ore? Charcoal was burned inside a clay or clay-lined furnace and iron ore added. The right amount of carbon monoxide at temperatures high enough to convert iron ore to metallic iron was required. Even then, the small globules of metal were not molten. A 'raw bloom' was produced, a spongy mass of iron containing impurities called 'slag' or 'gange'.

The next stage was forging. The blacksmith alternately heated and hammered the bloom to expel the trapped slag and consolidate the iron into a solid block of metal. The 'currency bar' in Case 6 is an example of what the blacksmith worked on and shaped at the forge to create the finished artefact.



Recent x-rays and experiments including the making of replicas have revealed that the firedog probably took three years to make, from the gathering of raw materials, through the smelting of the ore to the finishing of the artefact.

- **Write about the transformation of stone to metal and metal bar to artefact. Try to imagine the heat inside the furnace, the sounds of the hammering and the status given to those with the knowledge and skill to do this work.**

We very much hope you have enjoyed taking part in this writing trail and look forward to reading what you write. Please fill in the feedback form.

Acknowledgements For advice and help, many thanks to: Ceri Black, Kenneth Brassil, Steve Burrow, Evan Chapman, Tony Daly, Elizabeth Forrest, Adam Gwilt, Dafydd James and Elizabeth Walker at Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales. Thanks also to Joek Roex, John Pikoulis and Shelagh Weeks at Cardiff University.

Evaluation

What parts of this trail would you say were:

- very interesting
- not interesting at all
- too difficult/detailed
- not challenging enough

We hope that writers can soon receive feedback on their writing and that some work may be included in a display or sound recording of writing inspired by the Museum. If you are interested in any of these possibilities, please e-mail your work and contact details to writing@museumwales.ac.uk or hand them in at the Reception Desk in Glanely Gallery.

Susan Morgan 2005