Iron Age Wales

Daily Life of the Celts
Introduction
In this book you will be able to explore Iron Age Wales and the daily life of the Celts through the collections of Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales.

It is designed for you to pick and choose your themes:

1. How do we Know?
2. Buildings
3. Looking Good
4. Food
5. Work
6. Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales
How do we know?
Who were the Celts?
The people we call Celts shared similar religion, languages and art. They lived in the **Iron Age**, in places such as Britain, Ireland, France, Germany and Spain. Celtic people did not call themselves Celts. They were made up of lots of different groups of people.

The Celtic people living in Britain at the time were called 'Pretani' by the Romans. This meant the 'painted people'. The word in Welsh is 'Prydeinig' and in English is 'Britons'.

Hello my name is Taran. I lived in a time you call the Iron Age. It is called the Iron Age because we started making objects out of iron. During this time we still used other materials such as stone and bronze.
Types of Evidence

Primary evidence are things that were made during the Iron Age such as objects and ancient books. We can find out how people lived from the evidence they left behind.

Secondary evidence is information made at a later date such as modern history books and websites.

Hello my name is Olwen. We Iron Age Britons didn’t write anything down. The only written evidence you have of our lives comes from the Romans. Do you think you can trust what they said about us?
Archaeology

Archaeologists find out about people in the Iron Age by looking at objects and buildings that were made at the time.

Objects are found by carrying out excavations. During excavations archaeologists carefully dig holes called trenches and record what they find.

We built lots of buildings and used lots of different objects. We lived over 2000 years ago. Since then the things we made have ended up under the ground. Why do you think this has happened?

On the side of trenches you can see layers in the soil called Stratigraphy. These show you layers through time.
Recreating the Iron Age

**Reconstructions** are modern copies of ancient buildings. They are built using the same materials as they used 2000 years ago. The evidence archaeologists find is used to make a best guess of how they looked.

**Replicas** are modern copies of objects found by archaeologists. They are made using the same materials as the ancient objects. They allow us to see how the objects looked 2000 years ago.

**Reenactors** are people who dress in replica costumes and act out being a person from the Iron Age. They use archaeology and ancient history to create a story based on the evidence.
Hillforts

A hillfort was a defended area of land with buildings inside. They were often built on a hill. Not all hillforts were built for the same reason. Some were like a village, with houses that people lived in all year. Some would only be lived in for part of the year. Others were used to store large amounts of food such as wheat.

It took a lot of time and people to build our hillforts. We all had to work together to make sure it was built properly. Sometimes hillforts were built to show how powerful our leaders were.
Hillforts

Hillforts were protected by different types of **defences**. These could be ditches, banks made of mud, wooden fences, and stone walls.

**What material would you make your defences out of?**

*If we were attacked we shot stones at our attackers using slings. Can you see my sling and bag of stone shots?*

Reconstruction drawing of Llanmelin hillfort, Monmouthshire. Drawn by Alan Sorrell in 1940. This shows buildings inside, protected by stone and wooden defences.
Reconstruction drawing of the entrance at Twyn-y-Gaer Hillfort, Monmouthshire. These defences were made of stone walls and banks of mud.

Reconstruction drawing of buildings inside Moel-y-Gaer Hillfort, Flintshire.
Roundhouses

We call houses in the Iron Age roundhouses as they were round in shape.

The roofs were made of straw which we call thatch.

The walls could be made from different materials. The most popular material was wattle and daub. Wattle is a woven wooden fence. Daub is a mixture of clay and animal poo! Some houses had stone walls. Some had thick clay walls.

What material would you use to build your house?

Our friends and family helped us build our house. It was a lot of work, so we had a big party to thank them. We helped them build their house too.
Reconstruction of roundhouses built from different materials.

Modern workers putting thatch on the roofs.

Reconstruction of a roundhouse with wattle and daub walls.

Building reconstructions of roundhouses. The house at the front is stone. The houses at the back are wattle and daub.
Inside a Roundhouse

Cauldron

Bread Oven

Firedog

Fireplace

Loom

Loom Weight
We didn't have toilets in our house. Where do you think we went to the toilet?

This drawing shows how a roundhouse is put together.
Looking Good
Clothes

It is very rare for archaeologists to find clothes from the Iron Age. The materials used for making clothes were wool, linen, animal skins and leather. Why do you think it is rare to find clothes from the Iron Age?

Archaeologists have found tools that were used to make the clothes. Examples include clay weights used on looms and drop spindles.

It takes a long time and a lot of hard work to make clothes. It could take up to a year of work to have a finished piece of clothing.

Reenactors making clothes. On the right a drop spindle is being used to spin wool into yarn. On the left socks are being made.
Replica woven woollen cloth and bronze brooch.

Close up of a replica piece of woven woollen cloth.

Iron Age or Roman spindle whorl from Dinorben hillfort, near Abergale, Conwy.

Replica wooden drop spindle with clay whorls. A whorl is a fired clay or stone weight on the bottom of the drop spindle.
Jewellery

A common type of jewellery was a **brooch**. These were used to pin clothes together and showed people who you were.

Glass beads were used to make necklaces, bracelets, or charms.

Important people wore decorated bronze neck-collars, and metal necklaces called **torcs**. In Wales torcs were made out of bronze.

I am wearing a necklace made with glass beads. Glass beads are the earliest type of glass found in Wales.

Late Iron Age bronze neck-collar decorated with red and blue enamel, and a pair of bronze bracelets. They were found with human burial at Boverton, Vale of Glamorgan. They were an important person.
Glass beads found at different sites: Twyn-y-Gaer Hillfort and Gwernvale, Monmouthshire, and Glanbidno-uchaf, Powys.

Middle Iron Age bronze collar found at near Clynnog, Gwynedd.

Late Iron Age bronze penannular brooch found at Mynydd Bychan, Llysworney, Vale of Glamorgan.

Middle Iron Age bronze bow brooch. Found at Penllyn, Vale of Glamorgan.
Who am I?

How you looked was important in the Iron Age. The way you dressed told people about who you were.

Mirrors were rare and special objects. Only important people had them. Iron Age mirrors did not use glass but a polished sheet of Bronze.

How do you think people without mirrors checked how they looked?

The Romans describe different Celtic hairstyles. I've got a haircut that was popular for men. I put lime in my hair to spike it up and make it white.

Late Iron Age or early Romano-British bronze mirror. Found near Brecon Gaer Roman fort. Mirrors were possibly religious objects in the Iron Age.
Food
Farming

Plants that are grown by farmers are called crops. One of the most important crops in the Iron Age was wheat. It is a very useful crop. You can crush the grain into flour to make bread. You can also use the stems for straw to make a thatched roof.

Flour is made by grinding grain with a quern stone. It can take hours of hard work to grind enough flour to make a loaf bread.

Spelt wheat was a type of wheat grown in the Iron Age. This photo shows the husk which has the grain inside.

When the spelt wheat was cut it was arranged into a stook. This allowed the wheat to dry in the field.
Late Iron Age iron sickle. Found in Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey. A sickle is a curved blade used for cutting wheat.

Early Iron Age iron sickle. Found in Llyn Fawr, near Rhigos, Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Replica of a late Iron Age rotary quern. The grain is ground between two round stones as the top one is turned around.

Replica of an early Iron Age saddle quern. The grain was ground by crushing it with the small round stone against the quern.
Farming

Two important crops grown in the Iron Age were oats and barley. Oats were used to make food like porridge and oatcakes. Barley was used to make beer. Beer was drunk out of big wooden cups called tankards.

Beer was very important in the Iron Age. Even children drank it. Beer was shared around at big parties called feasts. The tankards were passed from person to person.

Late Iron Age or Romano-British wooden tankard with bronze handles. Found at Langstone, Newport.
Farm Animals

Most of the meat that people ate in the Iron Age came from farm animals. Cows, sheep, goats, and pigs would have all been eaten.

Chickens were a new animal in Britain in the Late Iron Age. I've not seen one but they had chickens in other parts of Britain. I've been told that they were kept as special animals.
Wild Food

Most food in the Iron Age came from farms but they did get some from the wild. Wild foods included mushrooms, nettles, nuts, berries, and crab apples.

Most of the food you have today was not available in the Iron Age.

Nettles are a really useful plant. You can put the leaves in stews and you can make string out of the stems.

Iron Age bronze wild boar figurine.
Found at Gaer Fawr hillfort near Welshpool, Powys.
It may have been the crest of a helmet.
Hunting

Boar and deer were the main wild animals that were hunted for food. Their skin and fur was also kept for clothes. Wolves could also be hunted for their skins.

Hunting wild animals was a good way for warriors to practice their skills. They had to be brave, stealthy and good with a spear or sling.

Iron Age deer antler found at Llanmaes, Vale of Glamorgan. Antler was a very valuable material. It could be used to make tools, handles and combs.
Cooking

The most common types of meals were porridge and stews. Bread, butter and cheese could go with these meals.

Most meals were cooked over the fireplace using cooking pots such as cauldrons. Bread was baked in bread ovens made of clay.

Iron Age iron firedog found at Capel Garmon, Conwy. These were valuable decorations put around the fire. They showed your guests how wealthy and important you were.

Middle Iron Age wooden bowls Found The Breiddin hillfort, near Welshpool, Powys.
Late Iron Age bronze bowl with red glass decoration.
Found at Langstone, Newport.
Can you spot the bee on top of the handle?

Late Iron Age bronze strainer. Found at Langstone, Newport. A strainer is a bowl with small holes in it. It allows liquid to pass through, but not solids.

Iron Age flesh hook. Found at Castell Henllys hillfort, Pembrokeshire. Used for holding meat while it is being cooked.
Work
Crafts

Most people in the Iron Age were farmers but could also do different everyday crafts. Crafts included woodwork, basket making, making clothes, and making clay pots.

Everything we owned was made by hand. It took a lot of time and effort to make them. Do you have anything that you made?
Metalwork

Metal objects were very important in the Iron Age. A person that makes objects out of iron is called a blacksmith. In the Iron Age the blacksmith was a very important person.

It took the blacksmith three years of work to make the firedogs for our house. We paid with a year’s worth of grain.

Iron Age iron blacksmith tools.
Found in Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey.

Modern blacksmith working in his workshop. The skills of an Iron Age blacksmith would have been very similar.
Reconstructed furnace. To make iron you need a stone called iron ore. To make the iron, you heat up the iron ore in the furnace until it is very hot.

Reenactor shaping copper with a hammer.
Trade

There was no money in the Iron Age. People were not paid with money for the work they did. People would swap what they made for something else. For example, a blacksmith could swap a tool they had made for food from a farmer. This type of trade is called bartering or exchange.

At the end of the Iron Age some tribes outside of Wales were making gold coins. These aren’t used like your money but are special tokens.

Late Iron Age gold coin found near Cwmbran. It was made by the Dobunni tribe but found in land controlled by the Silures. The Silures were a tribe from south-east Wales. The Dobunni were their neighbours from southern England.
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The Iron Age at St Fagans

**Bryn Eryr - Iron Age Farmstead**
Discover the Iron Age. Find out about the daily life of our ancestors, how they built their roundhouses and how they lived. Take part in activities such as weaving and grinding grain.

**Celtic Warrior Grave**
How do we know about our ancestors who lived thousands of years ago? Unlock secrets from the past in this interactive archaeology workshop exploring the grave of an Iron Age warrior.

https://museum.wales/stfagans/learning/ks2/
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