

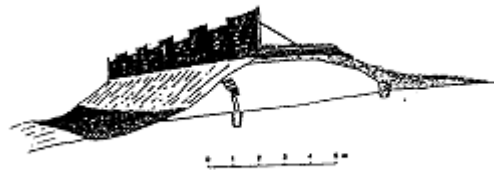
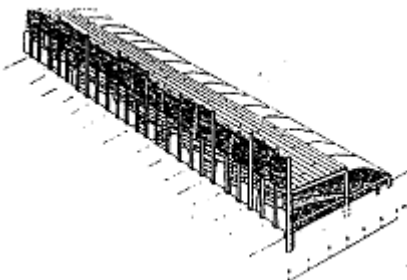
[Cymraeg](#) / English**Key Stage 2: Life in Early Wales and Britain****The Celts in Wales**

The Celts were first mentioned by name by Classical writers in the last few centuries BC. The name was applied to a variety of related tribes who occupied much of central and western Europe. Among these were the tribes of the islands of Britain and Ireland.

From Roman literature and archaeological evidence we know that the Celts were a **warlike people, lovers of personal finery and ostentatious display**. This is reflected in finds of elaborate jewellery, weapons and the remains of chariots. **Iron Age warriors** were equipped with a large shield, a spear or a sword. The shield was made of wood which was strengthened with a metal rim, a longitudinal rib and casing for the wooden boss which protected the hand grip. They fought on foot or from their **chariots** which were lightly made of wood and wicker and pulled by a strong, small horse or pony. The chariots were driven by a charioteer. The warrior fought either standing in the chariot or was driven into the battle where he jumped to the ground and fought his enemy in single combat. The chariot remained nearby so he could leap onto it and escape if he was hard pressed. Fighting rarely involved large numbers of men but was probably more often small skirmishes between tribes which sometimes involved stealing your neighbours cattle. Cattle were an important symbol of wealth in the Iron Age when there was very little money in coins and people had few possessions compared to today.

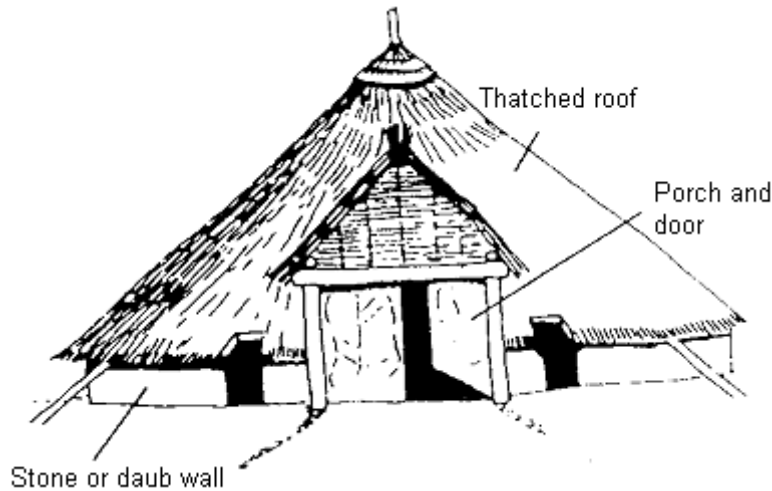
**An Iron Age warrior**

Archaeological investigation of settlements shows that many people in the Iron Age lived in hilltop enclosures or **hillforts** defended by one or more banks and ditches. The inner bank would have been topped by a wooden palisade or occasionally a stone wall.

**Two types of palisade**

Within the enclosure people lived in **round houses** often with porches over the single doorway. The houses were made usually with wattle and daub walls, wooden roofs thatched

with straw or reeds and with clay or earth floors. In some areas where stone was plentiful the house walls were built of stone. This is true of north Wales at such hillforts as **Moel-y-Gaer**. Often the houses had a central fireplace and sometimes a clay oven for baking bread. The grain for the bread was ground on rotary querns. The smoke would have escaped through the thatch. A wooden loom might be found in some houses where people wove cloth from wool or flax.

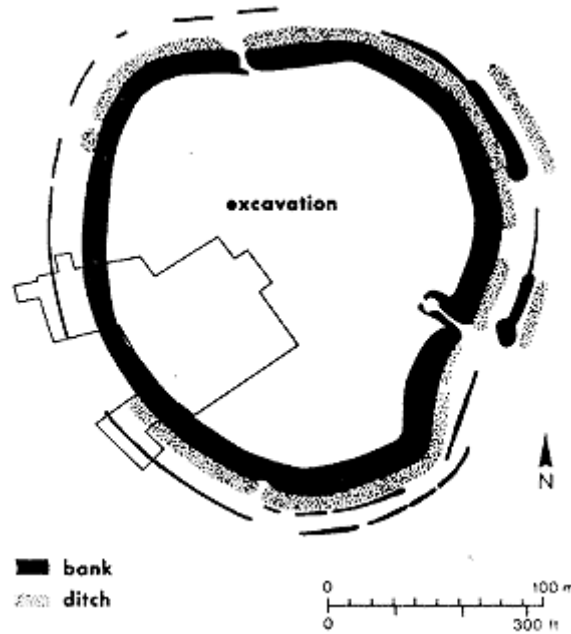


An Iron Age house

The Iron Age Celts were mainly **farmers** who grew **wheat and barley and kept sheep, cattle and some pigs**. The fields stretched around their settlements bordered by wetter ground near the river and by woods where wild animals such as deer and wolves lived. Other crops included flax, beans and herbs used for cooking and for dyeing cloth. Fields were cultivated using a simple wooden plough or ard which was pulled by cattle. Iron Age cattle were smaller than modern cattle, probably closer to the ancient Dexter breed. Smaller plots and gardens may have been cultivated with digging sticks. Wheat was harvested either with a reaping hook or by snapping the ears off by hand. Weeds and flowers would have been a common site in the fields.

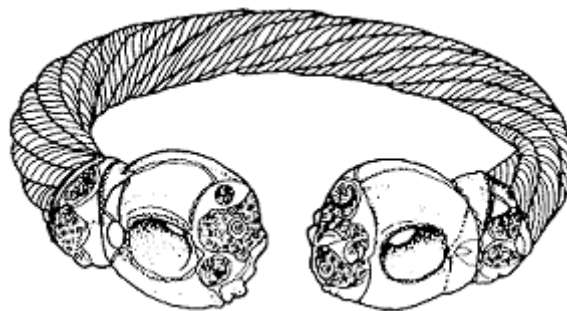
Not everyone lived in hillforts. Some people lived in **smaller settlements of a few houses** enclosed by a fence or without any form of defence. Their houses were much the same as the round houses found in the hillforts. Other buildings were used as workshops although many activities would have been carried out in the open. These include metalworking, pottery making, woodworking and the processing of hides for leather. In most farmsteads and hillforts the grain was stored either in pits in the ground or in rectangular wooden **granaries** which kept the precious crop dry and out of reach of mice.

Today all that remains of the places where Iron Age people lived are the **banks and ditches of the hillforts and cropmarks of former enclosures** and other features which can be seen from the air. Excavation by archaeologists reveals the post holes of the round houses and granaries as well as finding the broken remains of weapons, brooches, wooden tools and pottery from which people eat and in which they cooked. The best sites to visit are the hillforts: often the banks and ditches are well preserved and it is possible to imagine what they looked like nearly 2000 years ago. Smaller enclosures can also be recognised from the remains of their banks but they make less visual impact.



Plan view of Moel-y-Gaer hillfort

Not all people in the Iron Age were farmers, there were also specialist **craftsmen who worked in clay, metal and wood**. **Pottery** was made either with coils of clay or by shaping a lump on a wheel. After drying it was fired in bonfires. Pottery styles vary from one area to another although pottery was less common in Wales than it was in England during the Iron Age. Other containers would have been made of wood either carved, turned or made with staves. Wood was a valuable material for many purposes from making tools to building houses. Metalworking, in bronze, iron and precious metals, would have been carried out in the open. Simple bowl furnaces were used for smelting, bronze was cast into moulds but temperatures sufficient to melt iron could not be obtained and it had to be forged. The most common metal objects are iron swords, knives, axes and woodworking tools and bronze brooches, jewellery and harness fittings.



An Iron Age torc

Suggested sites to visit:-

Hillforts at:-

- Caer Drewyn (near Corwen)
- Moel Fenlli on the Clwydian Hills
- Gaer Fawr (near Welshpool), Powys
- Ffrydd Faldwyn (Montgomery), Powys
- Roundton Hill (near Churchstoke), Powys
- Castell Tinboeth, Radnor (also the site of a medieval castle)
- Castell Dinas Bran (near Llangollen),(also the site of a medieval castle)

(Leaflets prepared by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust are available on these sites. Details of other sites in your area can be obtained by contacting the SMR officer.)

Local museums have collections of material from Iron Age sites:-
at Llandrindod Wells, Welshpool, Brecon.

Reconstruction of an Iron Age Village at Welsh Folk Museum, St Fagans, Cardiff.

(Arrangements can be made for pupils to take part in activities associated with Iron Age life supervised by museum staff. Contact tel: 01222 397951.)

Further reading:-

Cunliffe, B 1992 *The Celtic World*. Constable.

Dyer, J 1981 *Hillforts of England and Wales*. Shire Archaeology.

Howell, R (ed.) *Archaeology and the National Curriculum in Wales*. CBA/National Museum of Wales/Cadw.

English Heritage *Resources 1994* (practical materials for teachers to use the historic environment for any subject).

English Heritage *The Archaeology Resource Book 1992*.

Reynolds, P J 1979 *Iron Age Farm*. Colannade. (description of experimental construction of Iron Age houses and farming techniques).

This information was compiled by **Caroline Earwood and Neville Townsend** for Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust, 7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL. tel: 01938 553670 fax: (01938) 552179

E-mail: trust@cpat.org.uk

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