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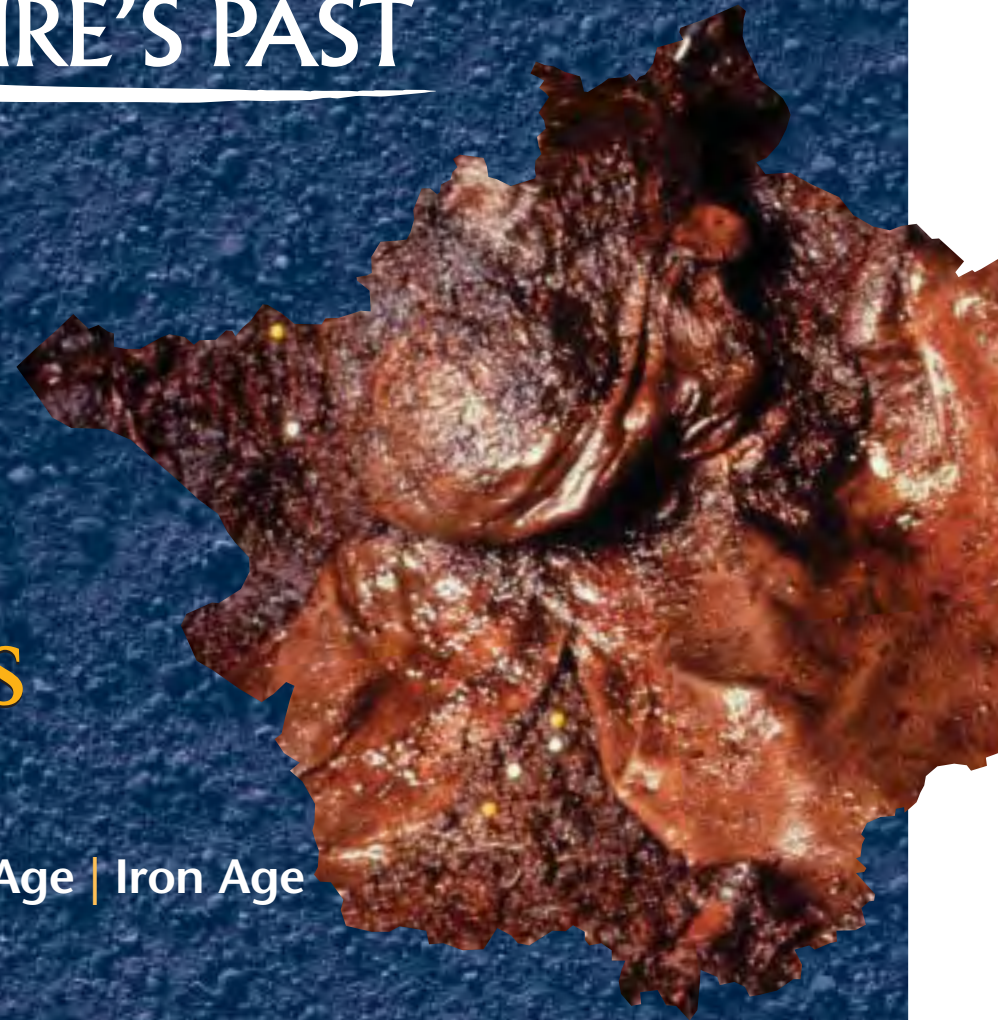


REVEALING CHESHIRE'S PAST

Barrows to Bog Bodies



Stone Age | Bronze Age | Iron Age



Who Lived in Cheshire?



Until around 10,000 years ago, Cheshire lay under ice. When this melted, it left behind a landscape of marshy lowlands scattered with small lakes and divided by high sandstone ridges.

Thick forest covered the land so people chose areas with lighter woodland cover to live in, such as high ground and lakeshores.

50,000-10,000 BC

Old Stone Age (Palaeolithic)

In the beginning...

The Ice Age was not continuous. There were times when the climate warmed and vegetation thrived, creating the ideal habitat for our early ancestors.

People may have been living in Cheshire by 50,000 BC, as a Stone Age hand axe has been found at the eastern edge of the county.



Tatton axe

10,000-4000BC

Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic)

Survival

These people hunted animals, fished and gathered roots, nuts and seeds to survive.



Flint tool

Their weapons and tools have been found scattered across Cheshire. These are mostly small flint blades, fixed to bone or antler to create arrows and spears.

4000-2500BC

New Stone Age (Neolithic)

The early farmers

Farming began in mainland Europe in around 6500BC. By 4000 BC the idea of farming had arrived in Britain. People started to grow crops and keep animals, creating a reliable source of food. This meant that instead of moving around to hunt food, permanent settlements were built.

Early varieties of wheat, barley and oats would have been the main crops. Bones of animals thought to resemble breeds like Soay sheep and Dexter cattle have been found.

2500-800BC

Bronze Age

Barrow builders

In the Bronze Age, permanent settlements were well established. People were not moving around all the time and they acquired more belongings.

High quality metal tools and ornaments and highly decorated pottery were made.



800BC-43AD

Iron Age

Tribal kingdoms

The people of Britain were divided into tribes. The inhabitants of Cheshire at this time were called the Cornovii. The skills to produce and shape iron were developed in this period. Iron is easier to work than bronze and is more useful for tools.



*Above:
Gawsworth beaker*

Left: Soay sheep

The Stone Age

Where did they live?

Temporary camps

Excavations at *Tatton Park* have found a Middle Stone Age flint working site. About 900 flints were recovered and the remains of a shelter were identified. There is evidence that people were making flint tools in a cave in Carden Park.



Cave in Carden Park

Early farms

Excavations at Tatton found evidence of brief New Stone Age farming. A scatter of flint artefacts and burnt grain was recovered with a **radiocarbon date** of around 2600BC. At Oversley Farm in Wilmslow, the remains of a Stone Age timber longhouse were found along with grain storage pits.

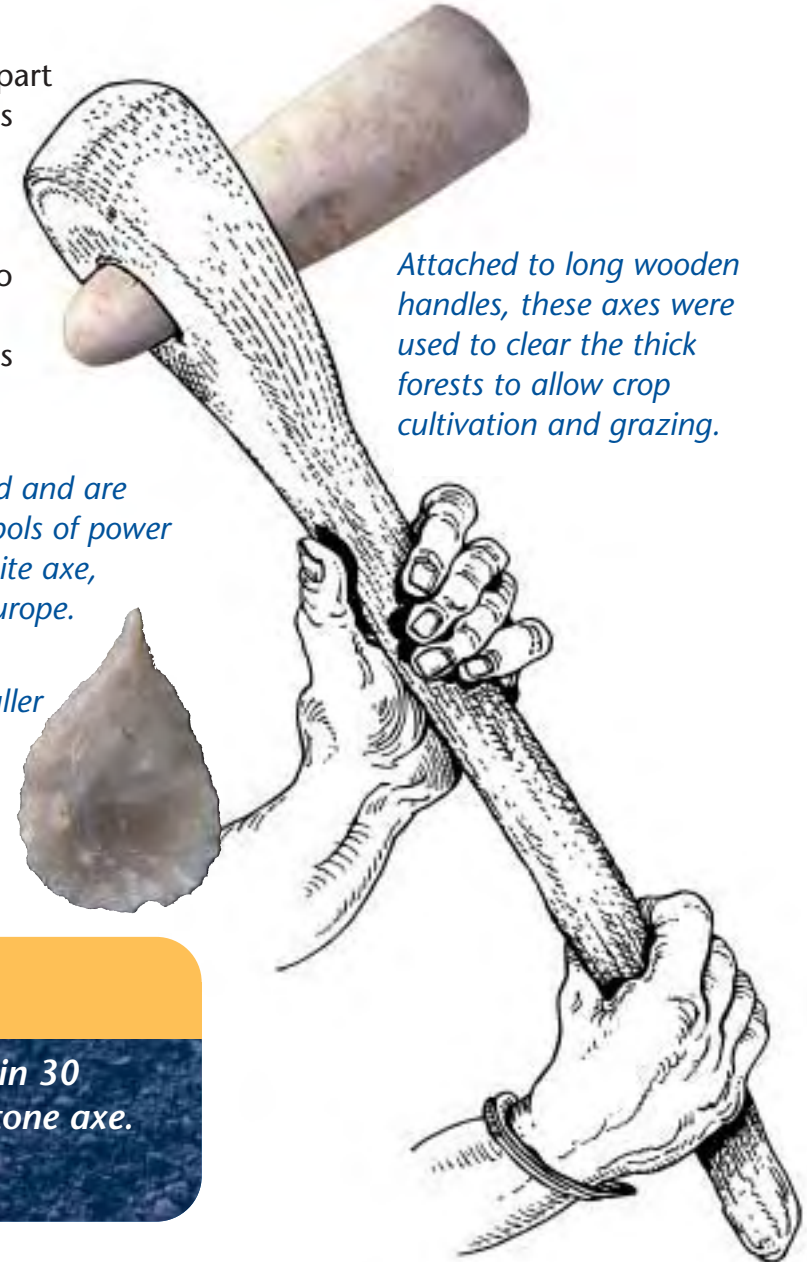
Stone...the prehistoric toolkit

Stone axes would have been an essential part of prehistoric life. Cheshire sandstone does not make good axes so stone tools were imported. Prehistoric "axe factories" existed in Cumbria, Wales and Cornwall. Stone was quarried here, roughed out into axe shapes and then taken away to be finished and traded. Axes of all these types of stone have been found in Cheshire.



Some axes were never used and are thought to have been symbols of power and status such as this jadeite axe, imported from continental Europe.

Flint was used to make smaller tools such as arrowheads, scrapers (used for working animal hides) and knives.



Attached to long wooden handles, these axes were used to clear the thick forests to allow crop cultivation and grazing.

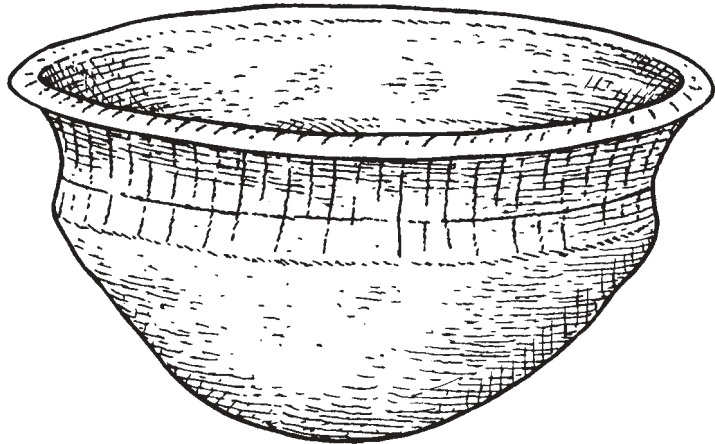
Did you know...

You can chop a tree down in 30 minutes using a polished stone axe. Don't try this at home!

The Stone Age *continued*

Pottery

Tiny fragments of plain hand-made Stone Age pottery have been found in Cheshire though there are no examples of complete vessels. We know what this pottery would have looked like (*below*), as we can compare the fragments to complete vessels from other parts of Britain.



Death and burial

In Stone Age Britain this is characterised by monumental tombs for the dead. There are three Stone Ages burial sites in Cheshire. They are a crop mark of a suspected **mortuary enclosure** at Churton, a possible long barrow at Somerford and the Bridestones at Congleton.

The Bridestones

The Bridestones is a Stone Age chambered cairn, a burial mound of loose stones over stone burial chambers. This kind of structure is associated with high status burials. Records show that in 1764 the tomb was 100 metres long and 11 metres wide. The stones that made up the cairn were later removed for road building, revealing the chamber inside .

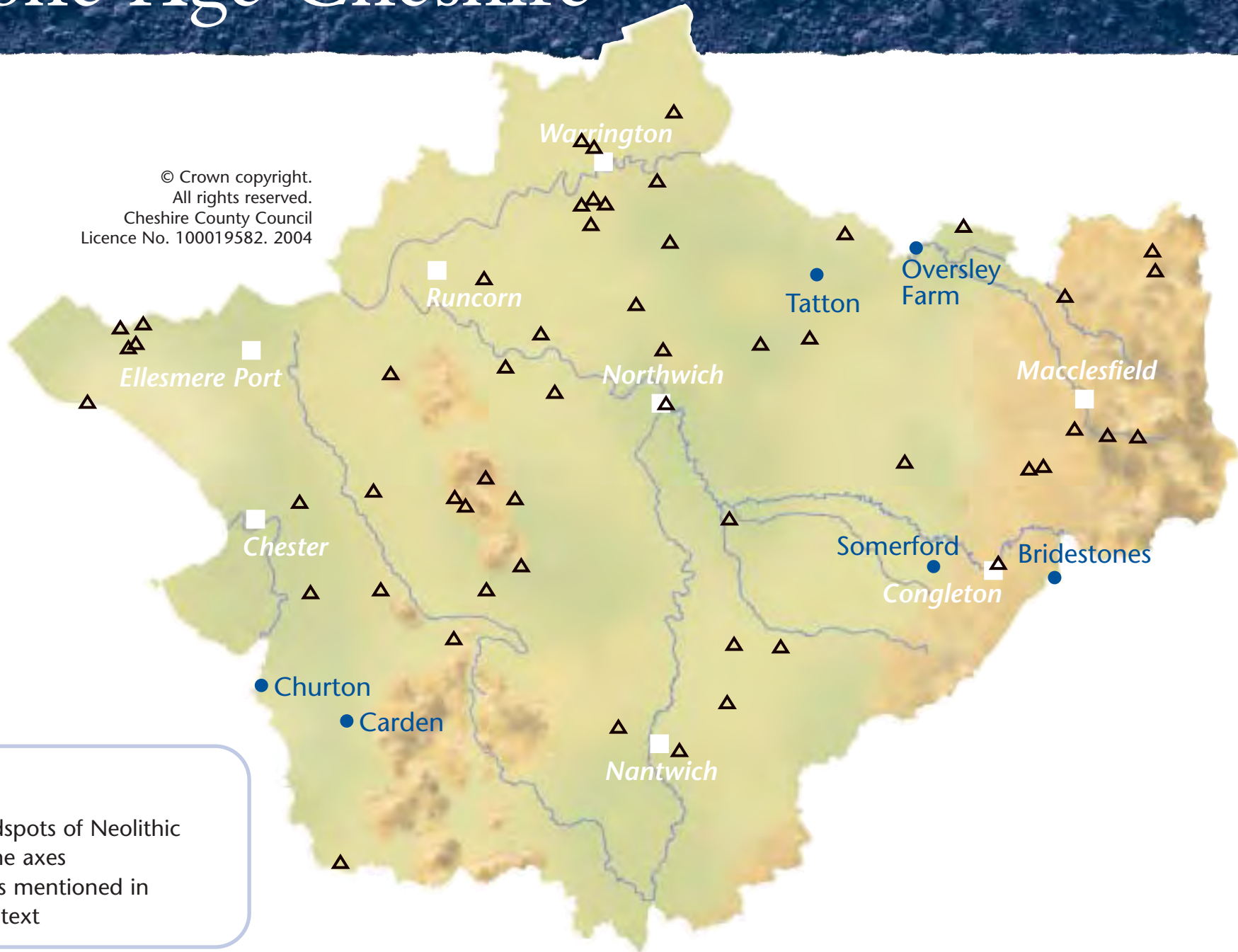
Today you can see the remains of one of three chambers and the portal stones at the southern entrance.



The Bridestones, Congleton

Stone Age Cheshire

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Key

- ▲ Findspots of Neolithic stone axes
- Sites mentioned in the text

The Bronze Age

Where did they live?

An early Bronze Age farmstead and trackway were found at Oversley Farm, Wilmslow, before the second Manchester Airport runway was built. This is an important discovery as we have little information about lowland settlements of this period. There is also evidence of Bronze Age occupation at the upland sites of Beeston Castle and Eddisbury Hillfort.

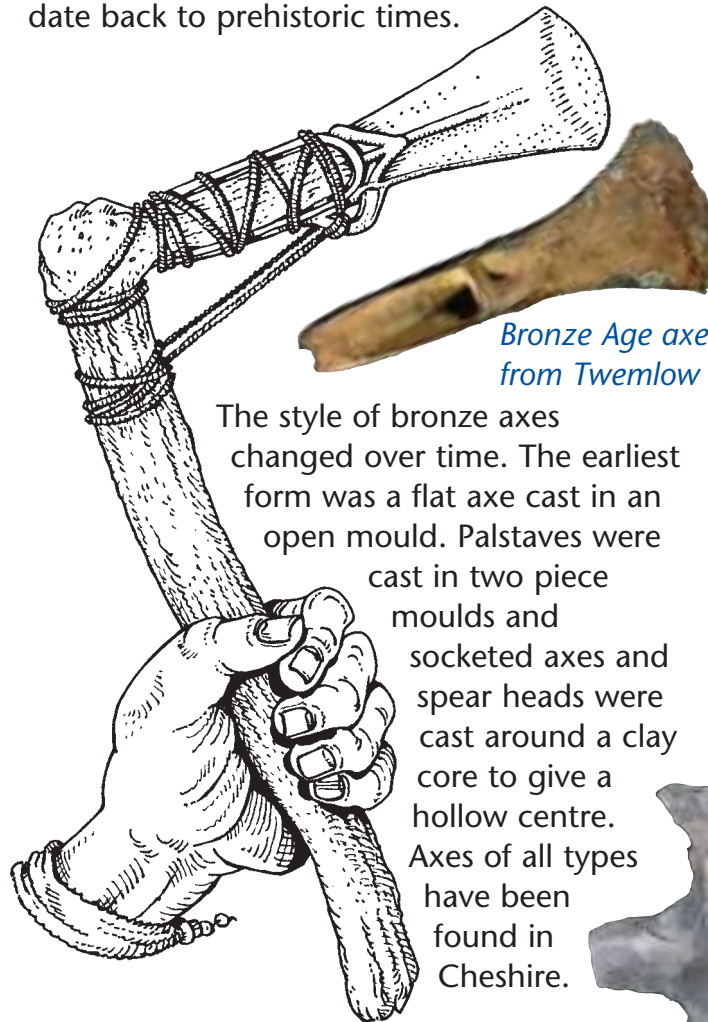
Masters of Metal...Bronze Age tools

The first metal to be worked was copper. Copper ore is green or blue in colour and the metal can be extracted by heating with charcoal. The resulting metal is soft enough to be hammered into shape. Copper mixed with tin makes bronze, which can be cast to create more elaborate tools. Not only did our ancestors discover how to work metal, they



Alderley Edge copper mines

knew where to find it too. The open cast copper mines of Alderley Edge date back to prehistoric times.



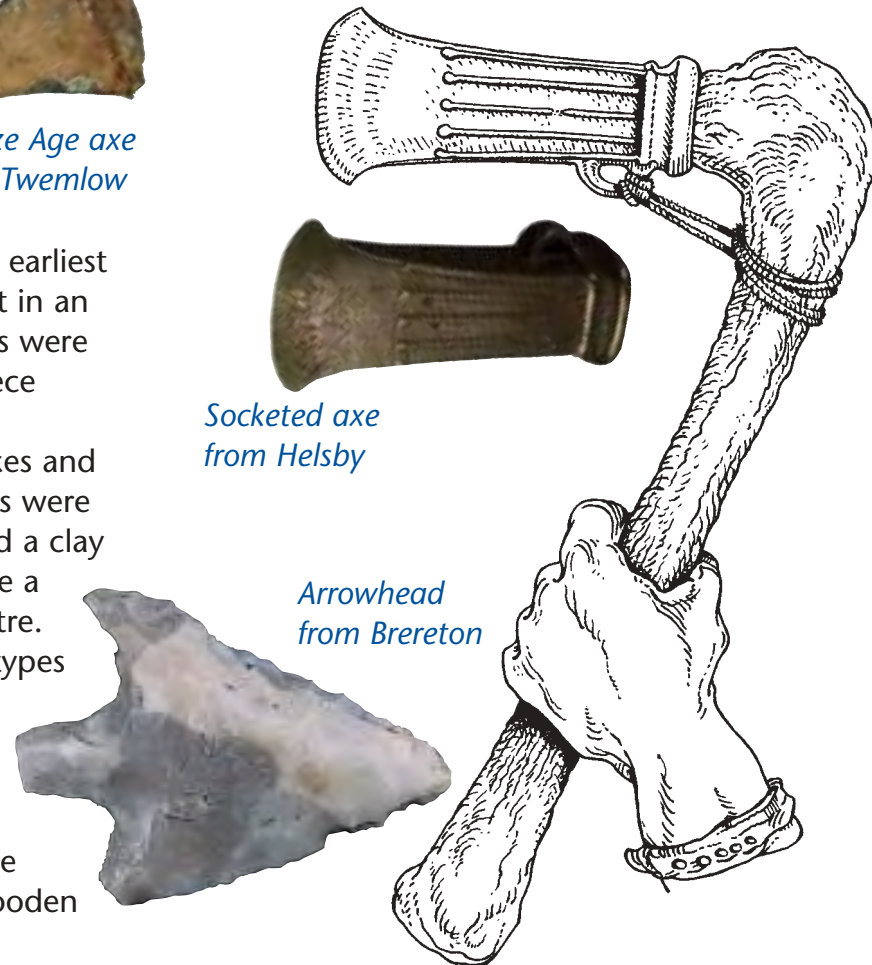
Bronze Age axe from Twemlow

The style of bronze axes changed over time. The earliest form was a flat axe cast in an open mould. Palstaves were cast in two piece moulds and socketed axes and spear heads were cast around a clay core to give a hollow centre. Axes of all types have been found in Cheshire.

Like the stone axes before them, these metal axes needed to be fixed to a wooden

or antler handle. Some axes had loops to help tie the axe head into place.

Not everyone would have used the new metal tools. Stone and flint implements were still important and most people would have known how to make them.



Socketed axe from Helsby

Arrowhead from Brereton

The Bronze Age *continued*

Pottery

Hand-made pots were used for storing and cooking food, but it is their use as containers for cremation burials that has ensured the survival of complete vessels over thousands of years.



Bronze Age urn from Betchton

Death and burial

During the Bronze Age, round barrows were a common method of honouring the dead. These are distinctive circular burial sites created by digging a circular ditch and placing earth and stones in a mound over a burial or cremation. In Cheshire, these mounds are usually sand. A single barrow could be re-used for several later burials. There are over 140 Bronze Age barrows in



Barrow excavation at Southworth Hall, Croft

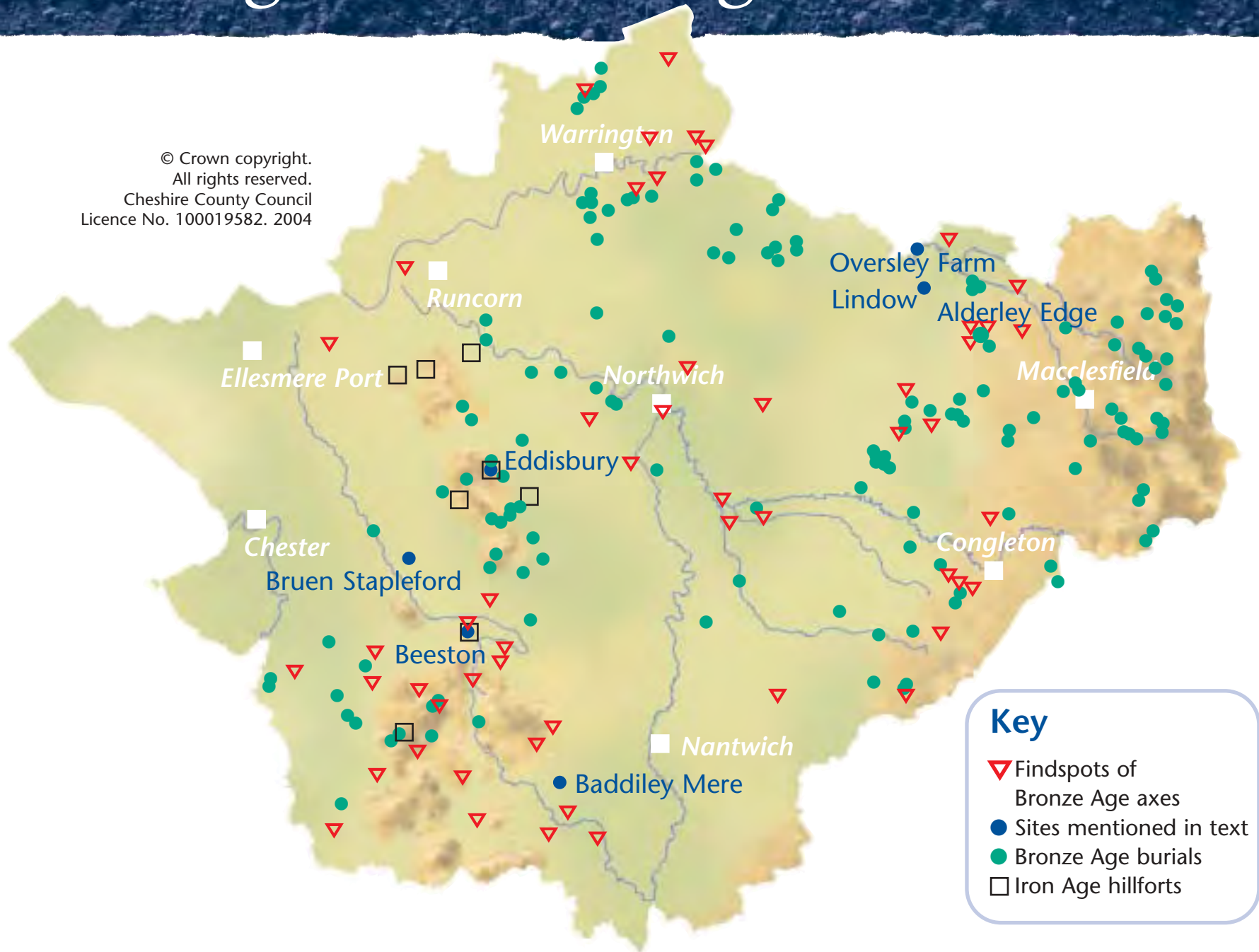
Cheshire. Few survive to any great height and some are visible only as ring ditch cropmarks. Both cremations and burials have been found in these graves.



Reconstruction of a Bronze Age barrow

Bronze Age and Iron Age Cheshire

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The Iron Age

Where did they live?

The settlements of Iron Age Cheshire can be separated into upland and lowland. In the late Bronze Age the population sought out the higher ground and this continued into the Iron Age. There would have also been scattered farmsteads across the Cheshire Plain. Aerial survey has identified a number of **cropmark** enclosures which may be Iron Age settlements.

Iron Age Hillforts

The sandstone ridges that cross Cheshire were attractive sites for defended settlements and there are a number of Iron Age hillforts in Cheshire. Most of them are promontory forts, which use a natural spur of land with steep sides. They have a short line of earthworks across the neck to create a defensive enclosure. Inside there would have been round houses, animal enclosures and storage buildings.



Edisbury Hillfort



Reconstruction of a hillfort

Iron Age Farmsteads

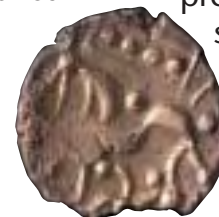
The sites of Iron Age lowland settlements were chosen because they were well drained and suitable for farming. Fencing or earthworks would have enclosed these farmsteads. Recent excavation for a gas pipeline has identified a settlement at Bruen Stapleford. The domestic buildings from this site were round houses. These circular buildings were built of timber with wattle and daub walls and a thatched roof.

Making a living

Growing crops and raising animals was an important part of everyday life. As well as farming, salt production was an important activity in Iron Age Cheshire. Brine from the springs of central Cheshire was boiled to create salt crystals which were then packed in crude pottery vessels to be dried and transported. Fragments of this fragile hand made pottery known as Cheshire VCP (Very Coarse Pottery) have been found at a number of places within and beyond Cheshire, indicating the extent of the salt trade in the Iron Age. The earliest VCP dates to around 2400 years ago.

Coinage was introduced to Britain by contact with the Belgic people of Gaul. Some tribes copied this style of coin and began to mint their own. The Cornovii did not produce their own coinage though coins of other tribes have been found here, suggesting there were trade links with other tribes.

Meols on the Wirral is thought to have been a long distance trading settlement since prehistoric times. The site was destroyed by sea erosion but thousands of artefacts have been recovered from the shore including some Iron Age pins and coins.



Iron Age gold coin from Warmingham

The Iron Age *continued*

Getting around

An Iron Age logboat was found in 1911 whilst cleaning Baddiley Mere. This logboat, made from a single oak tree, proves that the waterways of Cheshire were used for transport and probably trade, during the Iron Age.



Baddiley logboat

Death and burial

The normal burial practices of the Iron Age population of Cheshire are unknown. We know about where these people lived but there is little information about how they died, with the exception of one startling archaeological discovery...

Lindow Man – A sticky end

Lindow Moss was originally an extensive peat bog but it has been reduced to one tenth of its original size by centuries of peat cutting. There are records of men and cattle being lost in this peat bog but no one was prepared for the well preserved foot that was discovered during peat extraction in August 1984. The remainder of the body was found still in the peat and a block was cut around it so it could be carefully excavated at the British Museum.

The body was that of a 25 year old man, about 5ft 7ins high, of robust frame and bearded. He was naked except for a fox fur band round his left arm.

He met a violent end with blows to the head. His throat was then cut and he was thrown into the bog. Analysis of the contents of his stomach showed his last meal was a coarse wheat and barley bread. The circumstances of the death of Lindow Man suggest a ritual killing.



Lindow Man

Glossary

Radiocarbon dating

This is a way of dating organic material. All living things have a known content of Carbon 14 (a radioactive isotope of Carbon). This begins to break down on death. By measuring the amount of Carbon 14 remaining in an object we can work out how long ago it was alive.

Cropmarks are visible changes in the growth of vegetation that may indicate a buried feature. These distinctions can usually only be identified from aerial photographs.

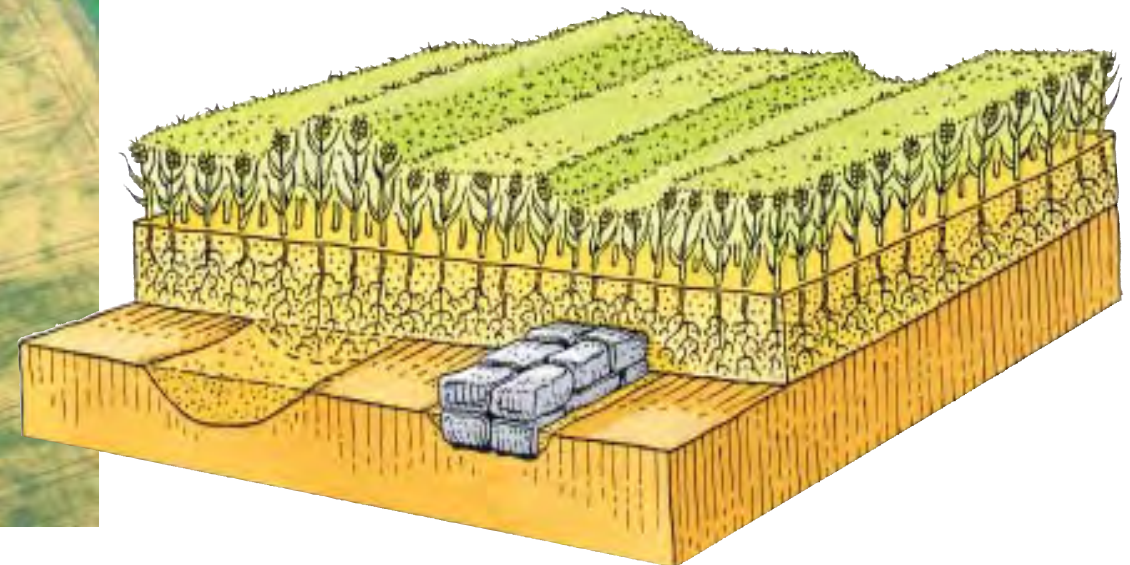
Scheduled Monument

A site designated as being of national importance by the government. This gives the monument legal protection against disturbance.

Mortuary enclosures are thought to have been used to house the dead prior to burial in tombs.



Cropmark of possible Iron Age enclosure



Sites to Visit

Prehistoric copper mines

Alderley Edge, Macclesfield

Map – OS Explorer 267 – OS Ref 861775
National Trust. Numerous paths through woodlands. Pay and display car park on the B5087 is open all year from dawn to dusk. (except 25th December).

Stone Age burial sites

Bridestones, Congleton

Map – OS Explorer 268 - OS ref SJ 906622
Off Dial Lane, to the east of Congleton.
On private land.

Bronze Age round barrows

Robin Hoods Tump

Map – OS Explorer 257 - OS Ref SJ 575599
Can be seen from Vale Road, SE of Tilston Fearnall off the A51. On private land.

Hillforts

Helsby Hill

Map – OS Explorer 267 - OS Ref SJ 493754
National Trust. Car park on Alvanley Road. A foot-path at the end of Hill Road South leads to the top of the hill.

Maiden Castle

Map – OS Explorer 257 - OS Ref SJ 498529
National Trust. The Sandstone Trail at Bickerton crosses this double ditched hillfort. Information boards at National Trust car parks at Duckington and Bickerton show way-marked paths to the hillfort.

Woodhouse Hillfort

Map – OS Explorer 267 - OS Ref SJ 511757
The hillfort is within a Woodland Trust wood. There are a number of paths including a section of the Sandstone trail, which pass the hillfort.

Museums

Congleton Museum

Displays include prehistoric artefacts from the Congleton area.

The Grosvenor Museum, Chester
The Chester Timeline gallery has a small display of prehistoric artefacts.

Warrington Museum and Art Gallery
Local prehistoric finds are on permanent display in the 'Early Warrington' gallery.

www.cheshire.gov.uk/archaeology

