

Learning: The Iron Age

Settlers of the Iron Age

The Ryedale landscape has been inhabited for thousands of years. Archaeological finds provide evidence of hunter-gatherers, for example the small flint flakes from arrow heads and blades found in the region.

Gradually, farmers replaced these hunters. Farmers pioneered small settlements intended to be permanent. They domesticated animals, including cattles, sheep and some pigs, and cultivated crops, such as wheat, barley, rye and flax.

These resources have been created to help you explore **daily life and farming** in the Iron Age, as well as **changes from earlier periods**.

At Ryedale Folk Museum, you can find out more about Iron Age life by **exploring our reconstruction roundhouse**. It is based on a typical Iron Age dwelling. These homes left their imprints on the landscape of this region in the form of postholes. From these, we know that roundhouses were constructed in groups so as to house extended families, with several families making a tribe. Living close to other friends and family members must have provided greater security, a sense of community, and access to shared resources.

Farming Life

Try our Virtual Mini-Workshop

It wasn't easy being a farmer during the Iron Age. There was a lot of work to be done and the community and resources would need protecting from other tribes. Explore Iron Age life and help our Iron Age farmer through this virtual, mini-workshop.

If you're planning a trip to Ryedale Folk Museum, your students can take part in this **virtual workshop** before their visit. Alternatively, the workshop could be used as a standalone resource for anyone unable to visit us.

In the workshop video, our Iron Age farmer shares his concerns about threats posed by other tribes. Your students can help him to feel better prepared and keep his home and animals safe.

You can see an example of the Tamworth 'ginger' pigs, believed to be the oldest pure-breed pig in the country, farmed since the Iron Age. You'll also discover how the development of iron had a significant impact on life, including on farming techniques as tools became much stronger, and also impacted the development of weapons.

You could use this workshop as a springboard for creating your own stories to be told orally.



Find the link to this video on the web page where you have downloaded these notes – or go to the Museum's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ryedalefolkmuseumyo626ua>

Explore the Roundhouse

If you are planning an educational trip to Ryedale Folk Museum, we would encourage you to talk to your students about what they will see here. This footage will prepare students for where they are coming.



Find the link to this video on the web page where you have downloaded these notes – or go to the Museum's YouTube channel:

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Questions to Talk About

As you watch the film footage of our reconstruction roundhouse, or explore the roundhouse as part of a school visit, you may wish to discuss the following questions with your class.

Why is it important that there is a cornfield next to the roundhouse?

Farming was an important development for prehistoric people because it meant that tribes no longer needed to move around to find food. Iron Age farmers grew vegetables and crops. You could talk about the foods that your students would miss if they had to exist on an Iron Age diet. At the entrance to the roundhouse there is a quern stone for grinding the grain for food preparation.

What materials is the roundhouse made from, and why?

Our roundhouse is constructed from a wooden frame, with walls of wattle and daub (a mixture involving mud and twigs) - these are all materials that would have been available to the people at that time.

The Iron Age landscape would have been wetter than today and our roundhouse is surrounded by areas of wetland. This would have provided people with resources including hazel and willow, particularly if they were managed by being cut back to encourage new growth. The rafters of a roundhouse would have been made with stronger, larger woods such as oak or ash. Reeds were needed for the roofing. All these materials required skill to procure.

How many rooms did a family have?

Families lived in a single, circular room together. They lived, cooked and slept there. You could talk about which rooms are missing and how your students would feel about not having those rooms!

Animals were often brought inside, particularly for the night, so the space would have been very full at times. In winter, having the animals inside would have allowed the family to benefit from the animals' body heat, whilst keeping the animals safe.

Would you like to have a fire in the middle of your room?

A fire would be very important to Iron Age people, as they would use it for light (there are no windows in the roundhouse), heat and to cook food. Meats and fish would be dried and preserved inside the house.

There is no chimney – look at the thatched roof. This is where the smoke would have tried to escape through - although the space would have still be very smoky! You could also talk about fire safety issues from having a fire in the centre of a room.

Would you want to sleep on a bed made of straw?

The family would have all slept together on a bed made of straw arranged the outsides of the room. Animal skins and furs would have been used to increase comfort, but it would still feel very primitive to us!

What can you spot on the loom?

During the Iron Age, cloth was made by hand using an upright loom like ours. Spinning and weaving would have traditionally been considered women's work. Loom weights hung down attached to the warp threads.

Fabrics were either woollen, from sheep, or linen, from the plant flax. (Cotton was unheard of here until the sixteenth century. We have also developed many synthetic fabrics in modern times.) Other clothing was created using animal skins and furs.

You could talk about the colours that your students can spot on the yarn. All dyes had to be made out of natural materials.

Ryedale Folk Museum – planning your visit

During an educational visit, you'll be able to explore our reconstructed roundhouse with your students.

Don't forget to download and **photocopy Spotter Sheets** to help your students explore the space.

Whilst you're here, you can **evaluate the site of our roundhouse**. Would you build your settlement here?

If you want to **tell stories in the roundhouse** whilst you're at Ryedale Folk Museum, don't forget to prepare some stories in advance. You can use our resources to help.

Booking information

You can book self-led visits to our site by emailing info@ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk or by calling 01751 417367.

The cost of a self-led group visit is £6 per child including VAT, with an accompanying adults visiting for free.

The Iron Age

In Britain, the Iron Age began in around 750BC and lasted until 43AD when the Romans invaded. It is called the Iron Age because people began working with iron (and other metals) using techniques brought in by travellers from Europe. Look around the inside and the outside of the roundhouse to see if you can spot these things.



trees



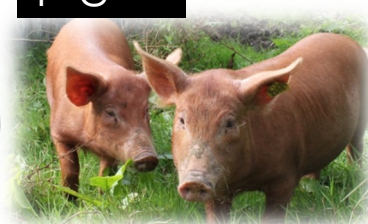
People built roundhouses with materials they could find. Look at the trees from inside!

cornfield



Iron Age people were farmers. They planted rye, wheat and barley in fields. Wildflowers grew among the crops.

pigs



These are Tamworth pigs and are similar to the breed of pigs that people kept in fields nearby, for meat.

wetland



Wetland areas provided people with resources such as willow for building and edible crops such as hazelnuts.

plough



'Ard' was the name for a plough. They were pushed by hand to break up the soil, before crops were planted.

quern stone



This 'saddle stone' quern was used for grinding grains into flour. It would have been used in a small pit or hole to save the grains.

beds



These areas were for sleeping.

skins



Cattle were kept for meat, milk and skins. They were hung on racks to dry and used for clothing and bedding.

skulls



The sheep skulls on display were there to make the tribe who lived in this house look scary and frighten off enemy tribes.

cooking pot



Clay pots were used for people to cook things and to store food and grains. They were simple patterns.

wool basket



This wool is straight off a sheep. It is then washed, combed, dyed and then spun before being woven into cloth.

loom weights



Archaeologists have found loom weights like these at the site of roundhouses. They were used for weighting the threads.

loom



Iron Age people made all their own clothes. Wool was spun and then woven on a loom to make cloth.

thatch



Iron Age roundhouses were thatched with reeds or straw.

open fire



The open fire burned in the middle of the room and smoke found its way out through the thatch.

Would you build a roundhouse here?

Iron Age families lived in roundhouses like ours at Ryedale Folk Museum. Some Iron Age people even created hill forts, with ditches to protect them from invasion. But would they choose a site like ours to make their home? Firstly, decide what you think would be important.

	Very important	Quite important	Not very important
Space for several roundhouses together			
A high location so that you can see a long way			
Trees nearby for natural materials			
A stream or lake for water and fishing			
Protection from wild animals or predators			

Explore the location of our roundhouse in more detail. Create a sketch of the area.

Can you label some of the important features?

You could include:

- wetland and water
- space for animals
- places for growing crops
- trees and coppicing for wood

What do you think are the advantages of this site?

What do you think are the disadvantages of this site?

Overall, do you think it's a good location for a settlement of roundhouses?

Yes / No

Iron Age Storytelling

During the Iron Age, stories were an important form of entertainment. Imagine having no electricity – no televisions or computers or mobile phones!

You'd want your stories to be good ones. Stories would have helped families to pass their **family history** from one generation to the next. They must also have been a way to be creative or to teach lessons about life.

It must have been very atmospheric **sitting around the fire** in your roundhouse, telling stories.

Use this sheet to help you create your own.

Planning your story

You're going to tell a simple story about a family member.

It can be real or you can make it up.

Start with: You won't believe what did!

Think about something that has happened – it can be something very simple, like:

- walking into a wall
- dropping the shopping
- sneezing loudly somewhere that is supposed to be quiet



Brainstorm – what could you say your family member has done and why is it funny / surprising / memorable?



When you have planned your simple story, see if you can make it more interesting to listen to.

Here are some ideas:

- Try to tell it in a way that builds suspense – don't give away what actually happened straight away.
- Can you describe the setting? Could you make it sound eerie or funny or atmospheric?
- Can you think of a line that your listeners could join in with?
- Can you add a symbol, like a colour, to add extra meaning to your story?

Now, practise telling your simple story until you're happy – remember it will be slightly different with each telling!

Your ideas