**How did Britain change from the Stone Age into the Iron Age?**

History which occurred thousands of years ago before written records existed is called prehistoric history. This includes the period of time known as the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age in Britain.

The Stone Age came first and covered a very long period of time so we break it down into three parts – the old Stone Age (palaeolithic age), middle Stone Age (Mesolithic) and new Stone Age (neolithic). During the Palaeolithic Stone Age, over 17,000 years ago people were hunter gatherers and mostly hunted, fished and collected fruits, berries and seeds then moved on. However, during the neolithic Stone Age (which is what we usually mean when talking about the Stone Age now) from about 15,000 to 3,000 years BC, people evolved from being hunter gatherers who were always on the move and learnt to settle down and farm instead.

It is sometimes difficult to know what life was like before written records were made however artefacts and uncovered settlements from the time help us understanding more. One famous Stone Age settlement, Skara Brae, in Scotland, gives us a glimpse into life in Stone Age Britain. The houses there were made of stone and had connected passages made from piles of rubbish (called the Midden). The houses were below ground so didn't have windows and had simple furnishings made of stone. Each house had one room about 40 m2 (some were larger than others) with a storage dresser, two beds, a central hearth (for heat and cooking) and small tanks. The roof was likely thatched and may have used whale bone. In this settlement there were 9 houses and about 50 people lived there. From the midden, we know they grew seeds and barley and ate seafood. They played games involving dice, made beautiful jewellery and pottery, and likely had religious ceremonies with carved stone items. There were no weapons in their settlements which shows they lived peacefully without weapons. They kept cattle and sheep, building pens to keep animals in for the first time.

After the Stone Age, came the Bronze Age, which began around 3,000 years BC (5,000 years ago). This was when people started using bronze, a mix (alloy) of copper and tin, to make tools and weapons. Copper is a soft metal, but when it is melted and added to tin the result (bronze) is a much harder and durable material than copper or stone so it was useful for tools. Because of this, Farming became easier more common, and this allowed the population to grow. During this time the climate was wetter than during the Stone Age and people moved into the valleys to farm. They lived in settlements of round houses made from wattle and daub and thatched roofs. Tools in the Bronze Age were sharper making cutting grains and meats easier.

Finally, around 800 years BC (almost 3,000 years ago) the Iron Age began. In the Iron Age, even better tools made from Iron made farming more efficient. Due to the introduction of Iron to the tools, farming evolved so the people used oxen to plough fields. Farming expanded, and people settled into more permanent communities. By the Iron Age, sharper, better Iron tools meant that farming became more efficient so less hunting and gathering was done and larger fields were created to contain livestock.

Each age (Stone, Bronce and Iron) marked a step forward in human development, from simple stone tools to the intricate workings of metal and as the tools changed so did the farms and lifestyles of the people. The Iron Age ended when the Romans arrived in AD43 and conquered Britain.