

# PREHISTORIC BRITAIN

## OBJECTIVES

This unit traces the pre-historic period of the British Isles, turns to the life and culture of the original settlers who had been there before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons.

## IN THIS UNIT, YOU WILL LEARN

- the geology of the British Isles before and during the Stone Age;
- the beginning of England with the Stonehenge;
- the Bronze Age civilization followed by the Iron Age culture;
- the Roman legions landing.

## OUTLINE

- Britain as a part of the continent.
- The Iberians.
- The Beaker folk.
- The Celts and their heritage.
- Roman Britain.



## SYNOPSIS

Britain became an island only after the end of **the last Ice Age**. About 3000 BC **Neolithic** people (the Stone Age hunters and gatherers) arrived from Europe (probably came from **the Iberian** (Spanish) peninsula) in small round boats. They kept animals and grew corn crops.

**Stonehenge** was built in separate stages over a period of more than a thousand years. By 2500 BC the first phase was completed. Although its precise purposes still remain a mystery, the monument was obviously connected with a sun cult.

The Iberians left their stone tombs (referred to as **great barrows**, or **burial mounds**) in the Stonehenge site. Those were also very common along the coast from Cornwall to the Orkneys.

About 2000 BC the Iberians merged with **the Beaker Folk**, so called from their characteristic drinking vessels.

From about 800 BC **the Celts** moved from the Central Europe in three distinct waves: the Gaels, the Britons, and the Belgae. **The Age of Iron** began. The Celts

knew how to work with iron, and were more sophisticated weapon makers compared to the people who used bronze.



**Stonehenge**



**Replica of old settlement huts from 2500BC  
(displayed at Stonehenge visitor center)**



**Beaker Folk vessel**

*Photos: Tetyana Kozlova (Wiltshire, England, 2017)*

Those were **the Britons** who resisted the landing of **Julius Caesar's** expeditions between 55 BC and 54 BC. In 43 AD the Roman **Emperor Claudius** sent his legions to occupy Britain. The most obvious characteristic of Roman Britain was the growth of towns many of which started as Roman fortresses: *L. castrum* 'fort' > OE *ceaster*, *caster* > ModE *-chester* in place-names as in *Portchester* (L. *porta* + L. *castra*), etc.

Outside the towns, there were other big innovations during the Roman occupation such as the building of roads (L. *strata* ‘paved road’ > OE *stret* > ModE *street*) and the growth of large farms (L. *villa* ‘country house, farm’, related to L. *vicus* ‘village, group of houses’). The Roman occupation brought cultural prosperity and stimulated the absorption of many Latin words into the native tongue of the British. For example, the ancient name of England is likely derived from L. *albus* ‘white’ which would be an apt description of the chalk cliffs of the island’s southern coast. The name, attested in Old English, has survived as *Albion*.

The fact that the Celtic linguistic heritage did not disappear under the Roman rule is evidenced by place-names of partly or completely Celtic origin: *Winchester* (Celtic *Wentā* or *Venta* ‘town, meeting place’ + OE *ceaster* < L. *castrum*), *Kent* (Celtic *canto* ‘rim, border’). The name of the capital is a latinization of Celtic \**Londo-* ‘wild, bold’.



## SELF-STUDY INSTRUCTIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Reading for this session on your own or partly alone, **it is important to give attention to the following issues.**

- English developed from the dialects of the Germanic tribes transported from the continent in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.
- Before the 5<sup>th</sup> century, English was not spoken in the area of the British Isles.
- Some words of the Celtic and Latin origin were introduced into the local culture and communication long before the Anglo-Saxon period.
- All cultures include universal and specific constituents.

**Assignment 1.** Read the *Commentaries* and consider the etymological and cultural ties mirrored in the word histories.



## COMMENTARIES

**Britain** /'brɪtən/ and the *British* are often called *Brythonic*, from Welsh *Brython* ‘Briton’. The Brythonic is one of two groups of the modern Celtic languages, the other being Goidelic. The Brythonic languages are or were spoken on the island of Great Britain and consist of Welsh, Cornish, and Breton.

**London** /'lʌndən/ is believed to have taken its name from the site of a Roman outpost. When in 43 AD, the Roman armies under Emperor Claudius gained control of the southeast Britain and established *Londinium* in the marshy

valley of the Thames. The first mentioning of *London* occurs in the year of 60 AD in the work of the Roman historian Tacitus, who described it as a celebrated centre of commerce filled with traders.

**Albion** /'æɪ.bi.ən/ is a name for England or Britain, especially the England of ancient times. This ancient name was attested in Old English as it was borrowed from Latin. Some etymological versions argue that the word was derived from the non-Indo-European base *\*alb* “mountain”, which also was suggested as the source of Latin *Alpes* “Alps”, *Albania*, and *Alba*, an Irish name for “Scotland”. But more likely it developed from Latin *albus* “white”, which would be an apt description of the chalk cliffs of the island’s southern coast.

 **Assignment 4.** Compile a list of the key terms. Add definitions in English and terminological equivalents in Ukrainian.

 **Assignment 5.** Design a task or a test for the secondary school pupils. Focus on the topic *Prehistoric Britain*. Take into account the level of secondary education and the English language proficiency level (see CEFR).



## RECOMMENDED READING

### Textbooks

Башманівський О. Л., Вигівський В. Л., Моркотун С. Б. Лінгвокраїнознавство. Житомир : Вид-во ЖДУ ім. І. Франка, 2018. С. 10-13.

McDowall D. An Illustrated History of Britain. Edinburgh Gate, Harlow, Essex : Longman, 2006. P. 3-11.

### Dictionaries

Online Etymology Dictionary. Douglas Harper, 2001-2021. URL : <http://ewave-atlas.org/languages> (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

### Internet Resources

Age of Ancestors. Episode 2. The World of Stonehenge. BBC Documentary. 2018. URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFo3AB2fzTE> (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

Age of Bronze. Episode 4. The World of Stonehenge. BBC Documentary. 2018. URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNtKMTCo534> (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

Age of Cosmology. Episode 3. The World of Stonehenge. BBC Documentary. 2018. URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDss6QRRG-c> (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

Age of Ice. Episode 1. The World of Stonehenge. BBC Documentary. 2018.  
URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqdhkuMTNWU> (дата звернення:  
13.04. 2020).

An Introduction to prehistoric England. URL : <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/prehistory/> (дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

Iberians. 2015. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9WMJJTWpVg>  
(дата звернення: 13.04. 2020).

Pre - historic Britain. URL : <http://britishstudies.pbworks.com/w/page/15133682/Pre-historic%20Britain> (дата звернення: 13.09. 2020).

The Celts - BBC Series, Episode 1 - In the Beginning - Full Episode. 2014.  
URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AU1dKfMIEUQ> (дата звернення:  
13.04. 2020).

The Celts - BBC Series, Episode 2 - Heroes in Defeat - Full Episode. 2014.  
URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVovskAh5QA> (дата звернення:  
13.04. 2020).

The Celts - BBC Series, Episode 3 - Sacred Groves - Full Episode. 2014.  
URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSHghGwdWNg> (дата звернення:  
13.04. 2020).

The Celts - BBC Series, Episode 4 - From Camelot to Christ - Full Episode.  
2014. URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfY4-2zKY-g> (дата звернення:  
13.04. 2020).