The Bronze Age

Kendal MUSEUM
Where History and Nature Meet

The Bronze Age begins in 2500BC when the first objects of gold and copper were produced, and ends around 800BC, with the use of iron. The Bronze Age is split into four periods:

Chalcolithic: 2500-2150 BC
The Chalcolithic is also known as the metal using Neolithic, or Copper Age, and is the period from 25002150BC. Although considered part of the 'Bronze Age', bronze was not used at this time and copper and gold were metals of choice.

Early Bronze Age: 2150-1600 BC
Archaeological evidence suggests that most people in Britain had not permanent homes and moved their herds of cattle and other animals from one area to the next. There is little evidence of settlements although archaeologists have recorded an increase in woodland clearance and the movement of people into upland areas. Along with domesticated animals people also ate wild animals, seasonal wild plants and emmer wheat. In the Early Bronze Age the dead were often buried in small round barrows, which slowly developed into complex barrow cemeteries. Throughout the third millennium hinges (a circular area defined by a ditch and a bank) were constructed.

Middle Bronze Age: 1500-1150 BC
Evidence suggests that at the start of the Middle Bronze Age great changes occurred as people started to build more permanent settlements, kept larger numbers of sheep and in some areas developed extensive fields for cultivating cereals. During this time there was a change from burials to cremations.

Late Bronze Age: 1150-800 BC
In the Late Bronze Age, settlements became bigger and new constructions such as hill forts, wooden platforms and ring-works were created. People continued to cremate their dead during this period.

Bronze Age: Metal Objects

1. Axes

Axes span the whole of the Bronze Age and change greatly in size and form over this period. They begin as flat axes, develop into palstaves, and then to socketed axes. Many would have been used the same way as modern axes, as a tooled for chopping wood and organic materials. They can be found as single finds or in vast hoards of Bronze Age objects.

Socketed Axehead

Late Bronze Age

Bronze Norfolk? KMA 1979.31

Socketed Axehead

Bronze Age

Bronze Newton Hall, Whittington KMA 1979.32

2. Dagger

Daggers would have originally had handles made from organic materials such as bone and wood but these rarely survive.

Dagger blade

The end of this dagger has been reworked and secondary hole has been drilled for re-hafting.

Early Bronze Age

Bronze Foulshaw Moss, Cumbria KMA 1979.28

Dagger blade

This blade has a serrated cutting edge which could be used as a saw.

Early Bronze Age

Bronze Beetham KMA 1993.3

3. Spearheads

These also span all of the Bronze Age and can change through time. They were mostly made in two piece moulds of soft stone during the Early Bronze Age and of clay by the Late Bronze Age. The remains of the hafts are occasionally recovered inside the spearheads and they indicate that hafts were mostly made of ash and pinewood. The variation of spearhead size indicates they may have been used for different purposes, for example smaller spearheads may have been thrown while larger ones may have been used as thrusting weapons. Evidence suggests that spearheads were used both in warfare and hunting.

Spearhead

Late Bronze Age

Bronze	Melbourne, Cambridgeshire	KMA 1979.98
Bronze	Arkholme	KMA 1979.29
Bronze (replica)	Tebay Fell	KMA 1994.74

4. Ballintober-type dagger

This dagger, which is dated to the earliest phase of the Late Bronze Age (1300-1150 BC), is a very rare find and only the second of this type in Cumbria. Four rivets remain in the hilt plate, but the organic hilt which would have been carved from bone or antler is lost.

Copper-alloy	Kendal	KMA 2013.1

5. Arms Rings

Bronze	UK	KMA 1979.178

6. Coins

Bronze	Broughbridge, Yorkshire	KMA 1994.68

7. Flanged Axeheads

Early Bronze Age

Bronze	Arnside	KMA 2002.3
Bronze	Carnforth	KMA 1979.97
Bronze	Kirkby Lonsdale	KMA 2002.2
Bronze	Untraced	KMA 1979.30
Bronze	Untraced	KMA 1994.78

Flints and Pottery

8. Box and Flints

Bronze Age

Flint	Orton Scar, Cumbria	KMA1994.79

9. Flint Flakes

Flint	Untraced	KMA 1994.91

10. Flint Flakes

Neolithic

Flint	Murton, Mill Cottage, Appleby, Cumbria	KMA 1979.124

11. Flint Flakes

Flint	Untraced	KMA 1994.92

12. Flint Flakes

Flint	Browfoot, Yealand, Cumbria	KMA 1979.26, KMA 1981.12-KMA 1981.14

13. Possible Pot Lid

Flint	UK	KMA 1981.16

Neolithic

Stone	Leighton Moss, Cumbria	KMA 1979.27

14. Rim-sherds

Bronze Age

Grooved Ware	Untraced	KMA unknown

15. Decorated Beaker Ware

Bronze Age

Beaker Ware	Untraced	KMA unknown

16. Grimston Ware Sherds

Grimston Ware	Untraced	KMA unknown

17. Peterborough Ware

Peterborough Ware	Untraced	KMA unknown

18. Iron Age Sword

The sword was found in 2002 near Hawkshead, Cumbria by a young boy who saw a piece of metal sticking out of an earthen bank. The sword was brought to Kendal Museum where the Archaeology Curator contacted experts at the National Museum of Scotland.

The sword is dated somewhere between 700 BC and AD 43. Only half remains but the design of the sword is typical of the Iron-Age with the shoulders of the sword sloping from the tang into the length of the blade. The large width of the blade and the shortness of the tang are quite unusual.

The handle has long since disappeared, but was generally small and made of organic material such as wood, leather, bone or antler, which rots quite quickly in soil.

The sword is on loan from the National Trust.

Iron	Outgate, Hawkshead	09/2002T

Prehistoric Tools

Axehammers

These stone objects belong to the Early Bronze Age. It is not certain what they were used for, but they were possibly a form of primitive plough, or used as a hammer.

Adzes

The blade of an adze is set at right angles to the tool's shaft unlike the blade of an axe which is set in line with the shaft. To use an Adze, the user stands astride a board or log and swings the adze downwards towards his feet, chipping off pieces of wood and moving backwards as they go. Adzes are most often used for squaring up logs or for hollowing out timber. They are also used for the demolition of old buildings by hand for salvage. A very similar, but blunt, tool used for digging in hard ground is called a mattock.

Hammer Stones

The four hammer stones here give us an idea of the different sizes of hammer stone used to produce the stone axes.

1. Tools

Axehammer

This is the largest axe roughout ever found in the Lake District. It was discarded due to the large notch in its side.

Late Neolithic, 3000-2500 BC

Stone	Great Langdale, Cumbria	KMA1979.58

Bronze Age

Stone	Untraced	KMA 1979.7

Bronze Age

Stone	Untraced	KMA 1979.11

Bronze Age

Stone	Glen Farm, Nether Staveley, Cumbria	KMA 1979.12

Bronze Age

Stone	Untraced	KMA 1979.8

Bronze Age
Stone Untraced KMA 1979.9

Bronze Age
Stone Crook, Cumbria KMA 1979.10

Adzehead
Neolithic
Stone Untraced KMA 1979.20

Bronze Age
Stone Endmoor, Cumbria KMA 1979.13

Bronze Age
Stone Untraced KMA 1979.16

Bronze Age
Stone Untraced KMA 1979.21

Bronze Age
Stone UK KMA 1979.18

Hammerhead
Bronze Age
Stone Threlkeld, Cumbria KMA 1979.22

Bronze Age
Stone UK KMA 1979.17

Macehead
Bronze Age
Stone Bagnalls Farm, Lindale KMA 1980.200

Hammerhead
Bronze Age
Stone Thorny Hills, Kendal KMA 1978.34

2. Polished Flint Axehead

The Neolithic polished flint axe-head has been embedded in a modern handle with a hot mixture of resin and beeswax before being lashed with wet rawhide. It is not a 'primitive' tool. Axes such as this had razor like edges but when used for tree-felling had to be wielded with short, carefully controlled two handed strokes directed all-round the trunk. If used too wildly stone axes break easily. When cutting into a tree trunk a polished axe head has fewer tendencies to jam than one with a coarsely flaked edge.

Flint	UK	0043/94T

3. Polished Axeheads

To produce the smooth shiny surface of the axes, these Neolithic axeheads are ground and polished with natural abrasives.

Stone	UK	KMA 1979.152
Stone	Levens Moss, Cumbria	KMA 1978.32
Stone	UK	KMA 1981.18
Flint	Kendal, Cumbria	KMA 1979.35
Stone	Bigland Hall, Cumbria	KMA 1993.4
Stone	Levens Moss, Cumbria	KMA 1979.4
Stone	Langdale, Cumbria	KMA 1979.43
Pounder Stone	The Hawk, Broughton-in Furness, Cumbria	KMA 1979.37
Stone	Pitcairn Island	KMA 1994.97

4. Neolithic Axe Head Roughout

The cutting edge, butt and one side have been roughly shaped, and the cutting edge can be clearly seen.

Volcanic tuff	Central Fells, Cumbria	KMA 2017.3

5. Maceheads

These would have been pecked and ground into shape, and often retain evidence, in the form of little indentations on the surface, of the pecking process used in shaping. The central hole was bored by using sand and a drill and the 'hourglass' shape in profile suggests that the macehead was drilled from both sides. This shape might have improved hafting, especially if the wooden haft was swollen once it was held in the centre. It is thought these were used for breaking or crushing nuts, bones and other food sources.

Neolithic Worked Pebble

This flat pebble has two roughly cut slots intended to take a lashing. The stone could have had a number of uses as a weight or missile.

Stone	UK	KMA 1979.146
Stone	UK	KMA 1979.145

Unfinished Macehead

This example of a worked pebble has had its shape modified to produce a degree of symmetry but still shows the results of unfinished efforts to pierce a central hole.

Neolithic		
Stone	Levens Bridge, Cumbria	KMA 1979.3

Macehead

Stone	Oaks Farm, Loughrigg Cumbria	KMA 1979.6
Early Neolithic		
Sandstone	Shap Quarry, Shap, Cumbria	KMA 1979.2

6. Collection of hand tools

Handaxe

Flint	Untraced	KMA 1994.95

Hammerstone

Neolithic Stone	Great Langdale, Cumbria	KMA 1979.69
Neolithic Granite	Great Langdale, Cumbria	KMA 1979.70

7. Fragments

This collection of axe head fragments is from the large Mike Davies-Shiel collection; they show various markings created by the percussion and shock wave effect of striking flint off the core block. Though some of these flakes show weathering, this knapping or flaking pattern cannot be mimicked by weathering procedures such as frost.

KMA 2012.10.76 KMA 2012.10.74
KMA 2012.10.84 KMA 2012.10.16
KMA 2012.10.83

8. Axe heads

This collection of axe heads show the variety in size and shape before their polishing or in some cases completion. These are all part of the larger Mike Davies-Shiel collection, more examples showing variety in stone type and size can be seen in the wooden cabinet. They are all made of stone and were found in the Central Fells, Cumbria.

KMA 2012.10.87 KMA 2012.10.22
KMA 2012.10.15 KMA 2012.10.27
KMA 2012.10.14 KMA 2012.10.58
KMA 2012.10.7 KMA 2012.10.5
KMA 2012.10.75 KMA 2012.10.96
KMA 2012.10.1

Mesolithic Small Tools

1. Blades

2. Saw Blades

3. Borers and Awls
These were used for piercing leather, as the bone needles used for sewing were too brittle.

4. Knives

5. Microliths
These were probably mounted in wood using animal glue, and used like a serrated knife.

6. Scrapers
These were used to cut meat and to clean animal skins.

7. Cores

8. Tanged and Barbed Arrowheads

Flint	Kendal, Cumbia	KMA 1979.153

9. Hollow Based Arrowheads

10. Petit Tranchet Arrowheads

11. Leaf Arrowheads