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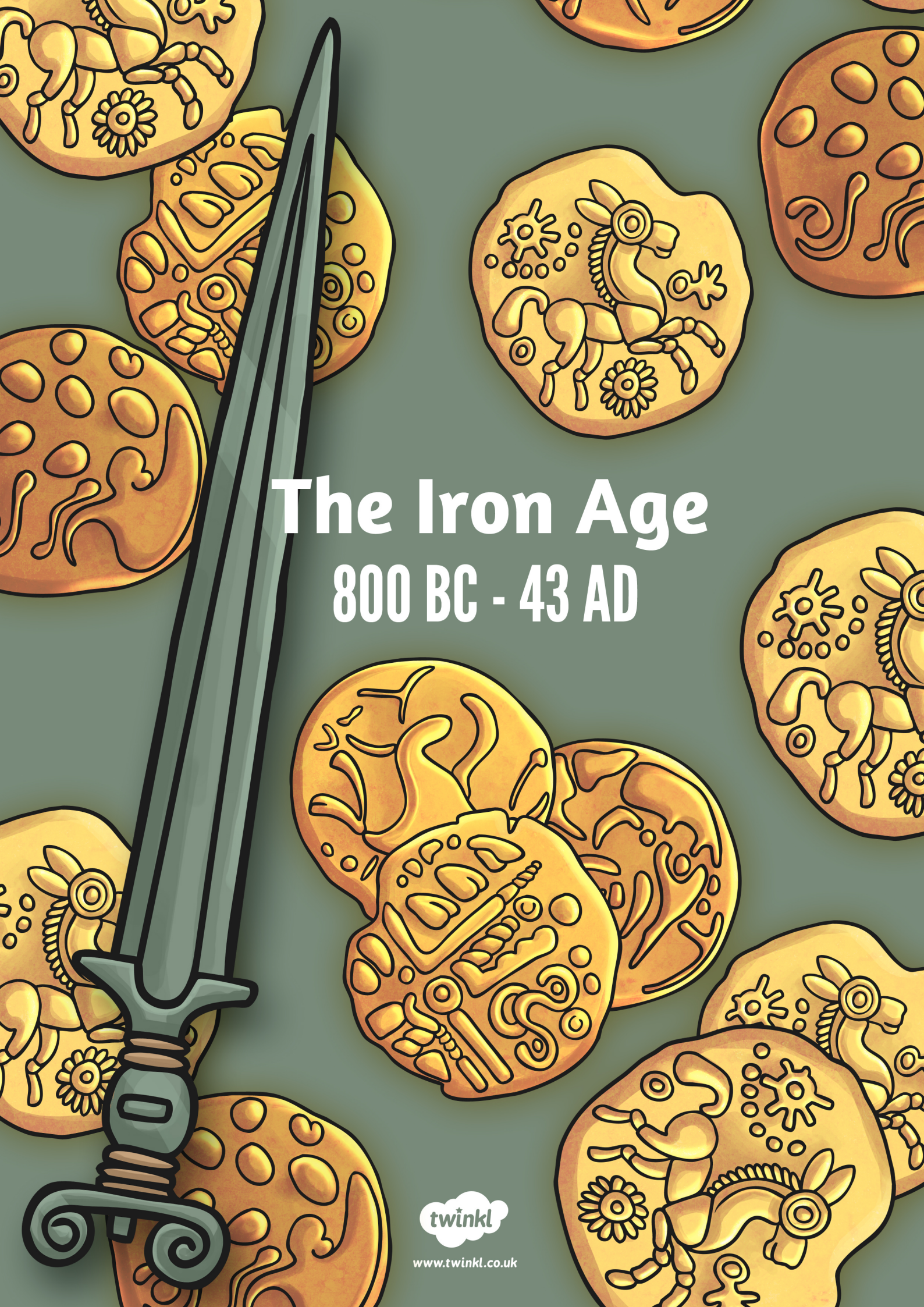
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The Iron Age

800 BC - 43 AD

twinkl

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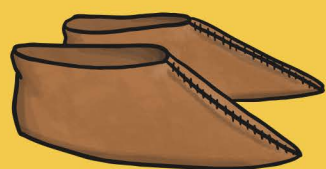
When was the Iron Age?

The Iron Age refers to the period of time in Britain, from around 800BC until the Roman conquest in 43AD, when iron and steel began to be used to make tools and weapons instead of bronze. Iron was a stronger, harder metal than the bronze previously used. It was worked into shape by hammering it against an anvil – a process known as smithing - and was used to make objects such as ploughs, armour and coins (which were used for the first time in the Iron Age, around 100BC). Significant changes in farming techniques and technology also occurred during this period in history and led to a significant population increase.

Who are the Celts?

The people living in Europe during the Iron Age are referred to as Celts, although this term was not used until the eighteenth century and so would not have been what the Celtic people actually named themselves at the time. The Celtic people living in Britain were actually referred to as 'Britons' by the Romans. The word Celt, which means 'barbarian' comes from the Greek word 'Keltai'. The Iron Age people were reported to have worn close fitting trousers with a long linen or woollen tunic which was tied with a belt. Fabrics were dyed in a variety of bright colours and checked or striped patterns were often used, probably not unlike the Scottish tartan of today.







Farming and Agriculture

During the Iron Age Britain consisted, almost entirely, of settled farming communities. This meant that nearly everyone would have lived on a farm. The people worked together in small communities, tending their livestock and growing crops.

Evidence shows that land was organised and used very effectively during the Iron Age. Fields were sectioned in rectangular patterns and every usable area of land was planted (even if the ground was very steep). The population in Iron Age Britain was rising steadily and in the later Iron Age, about 100BC, woodland was cleared so that the land could be used to grow more crops to feed the people.

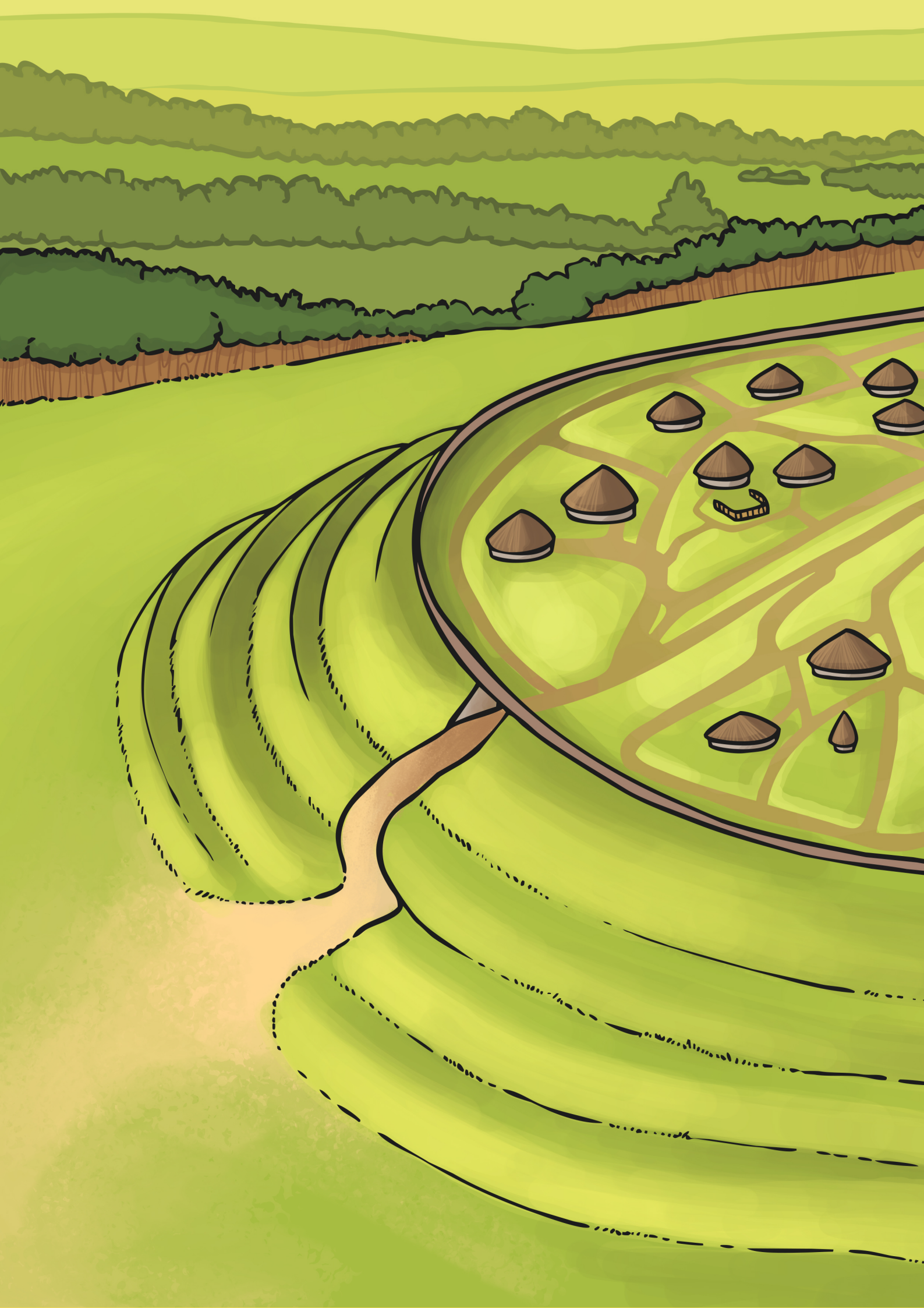
The Celts used an 'ard', which was like a simple plough, to move the soil. It is

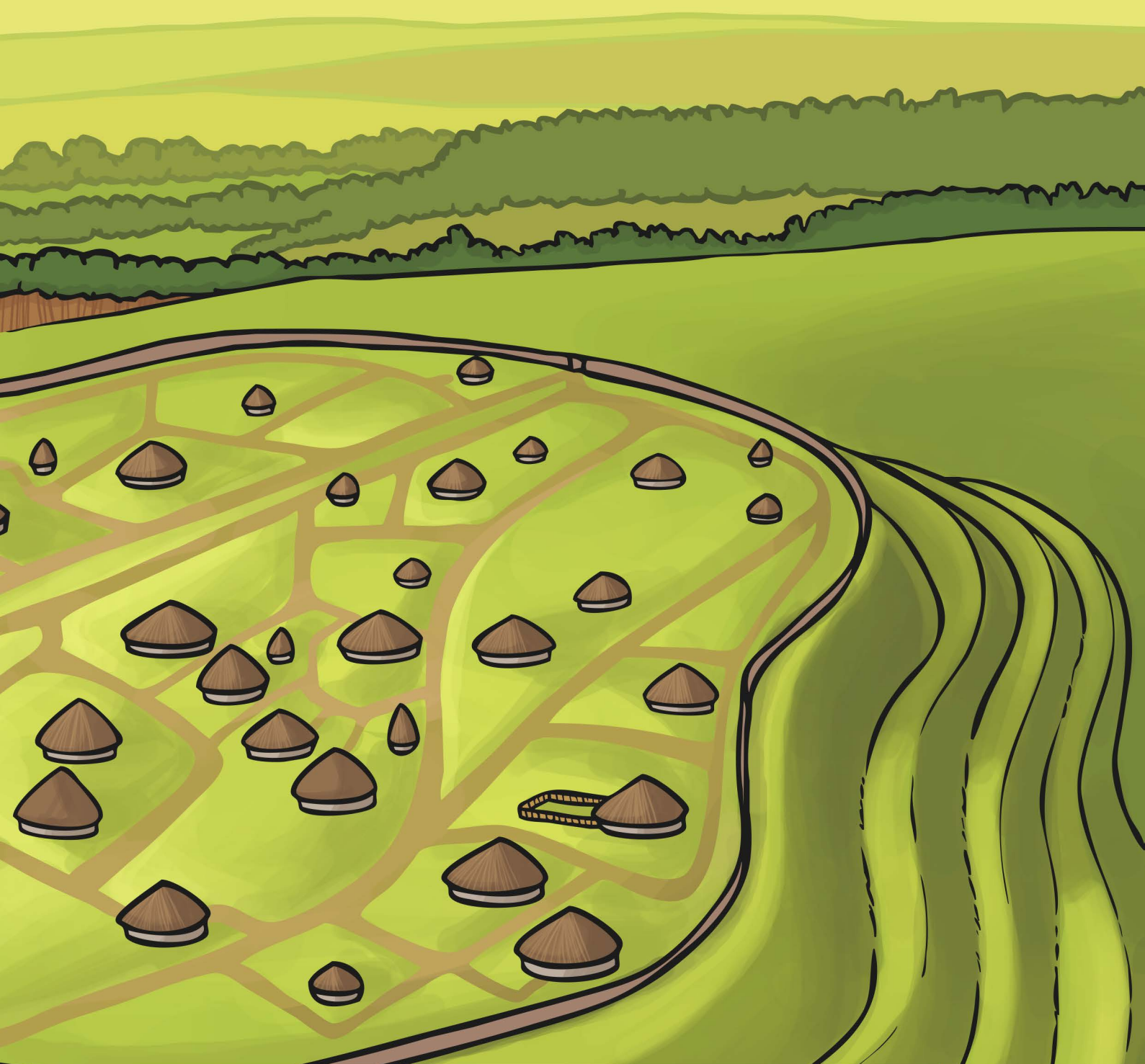
believed that they developed the practice of manuring the soil to improve it, using substances such as chalk and loam (a composted soil made of sand, silt and clay).

They kept their crops in granaries that were raised on posts from the ground, or in pits dug into the earth. Crops such as spelt wheat, barley, rye and oats were grown but there were very few vegetables available in Iron Age Britain.

Animals were farmed for their meat, hides and also to provide milk. Wool was used to make clothing and blankets. Cows and sheep were the most commonly farmed animals during the Iron Age but pigs were also kept.







Hillforts

The first hill forts were constructed from around 800BC. These were defended settlements that made use of natural rises in the landscape for defensive advantage. Between 500 and 100BC many parts of Britain were dominated by hill forts with settlements providing a home for hundreds, and later thousands of people. The remains of some very large hill forts, which made complex changes to the landscape and entrances, have been discovered. One example is Maiden Castle in Dorset which was one of the biggest hill forts in Europe.

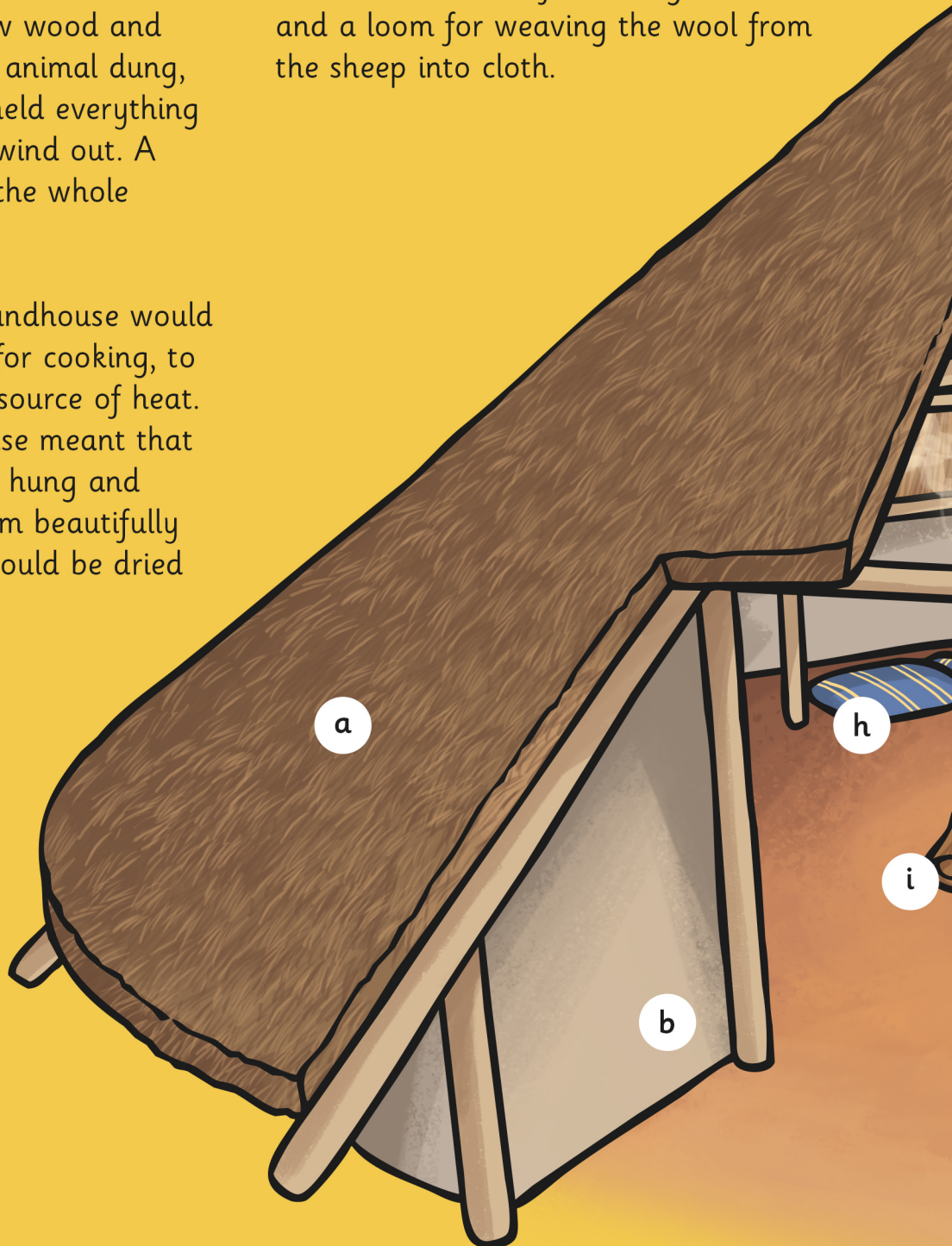
Roundhouses

Archaeological evidence shows that the roundhouse was the typical Iron Age home. Some of these were very large and would have housed many people. The frame of the house was constructed out of large timbers and the walls were made out of wattle and daub. Wattle was interwoven sticks of hazel or willow wood and daub was a mixture of animal dung, clay and straw which held everything together and kept the wind out. A thatched roof covered the whole structure.

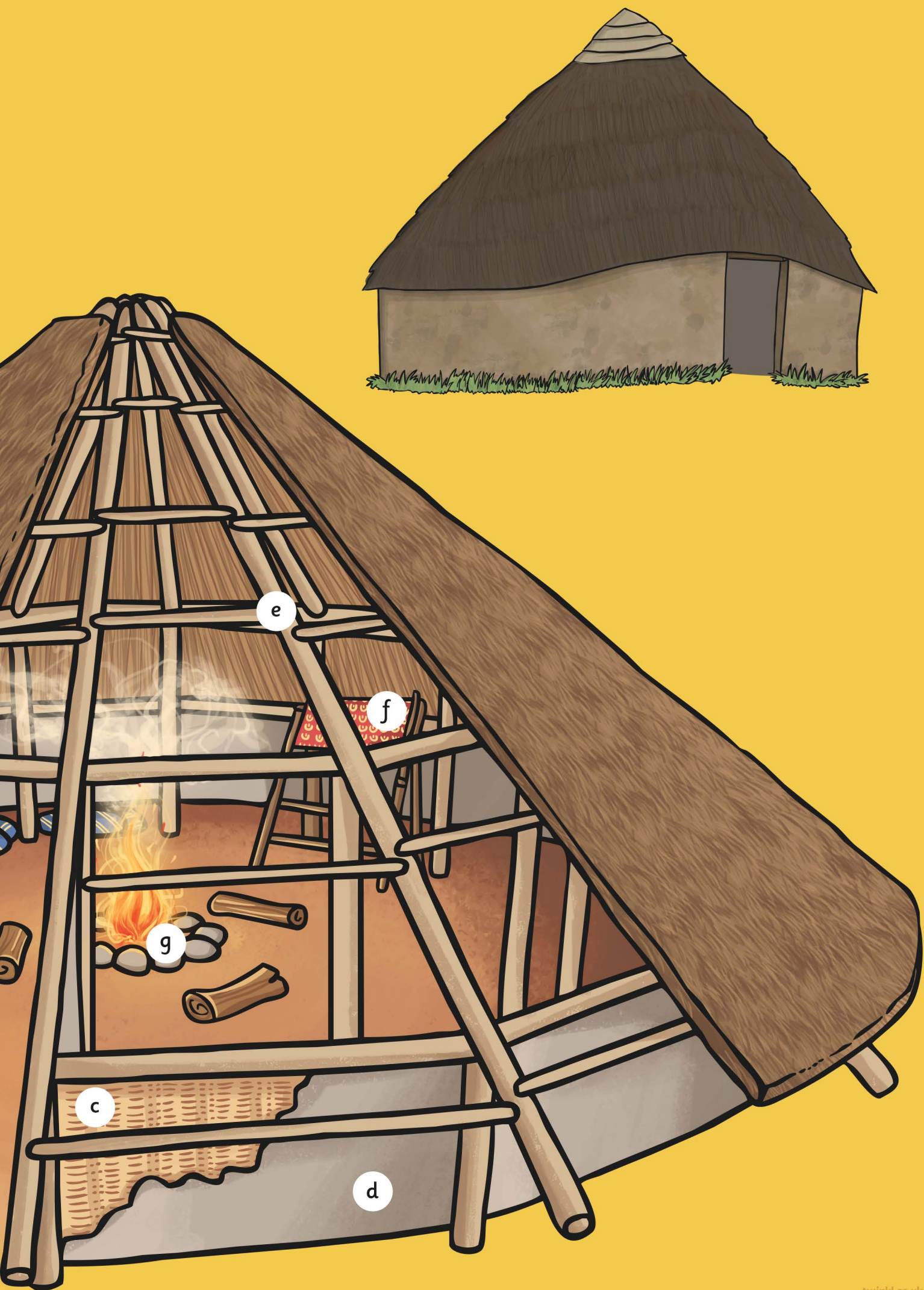
In the centre of the roundhouse would have been a fire, used for cooking, to provide light and as a source of heat. The warmth in the house meant that meat and fish could be hung and smoked, preserving them beautifully and plants and herbs could be dried out too.

Beds may have had hay or feather mattresses placed on top of a wooden frame and animal skins and woollen blankets would have been used to keep the people cosy and warm.

The roundhouse may also have contained an oven for baking bread and a loom for weaving the wool from the sheep into cloth.



- a. thick thatch
- b. door
- c. wattle
- d. daub
- e. timber frame
- f. upright loom
- g. hearth (fire)
- h. beds
- i. logs for sitting



Warriors and Weapons

The Celtic warriors from the Iron Age were described by the Romans who met them as large, strong and fearsome characters with white spiked up hair and blue painted bodies. They used lime to colour and spike their hair and a substance called woad to paint blue patterns on their bodies. It is reported that many Celtic warriors charged into battle without any weapons or armour, and sometimes without any clothes at all! The warriors who did carry weapons would have used iron swords and oval shaped wooden shields. They also fought with iron tipped spears. Their startling appearance must indeed have been a fearful sight to the invading Romans.



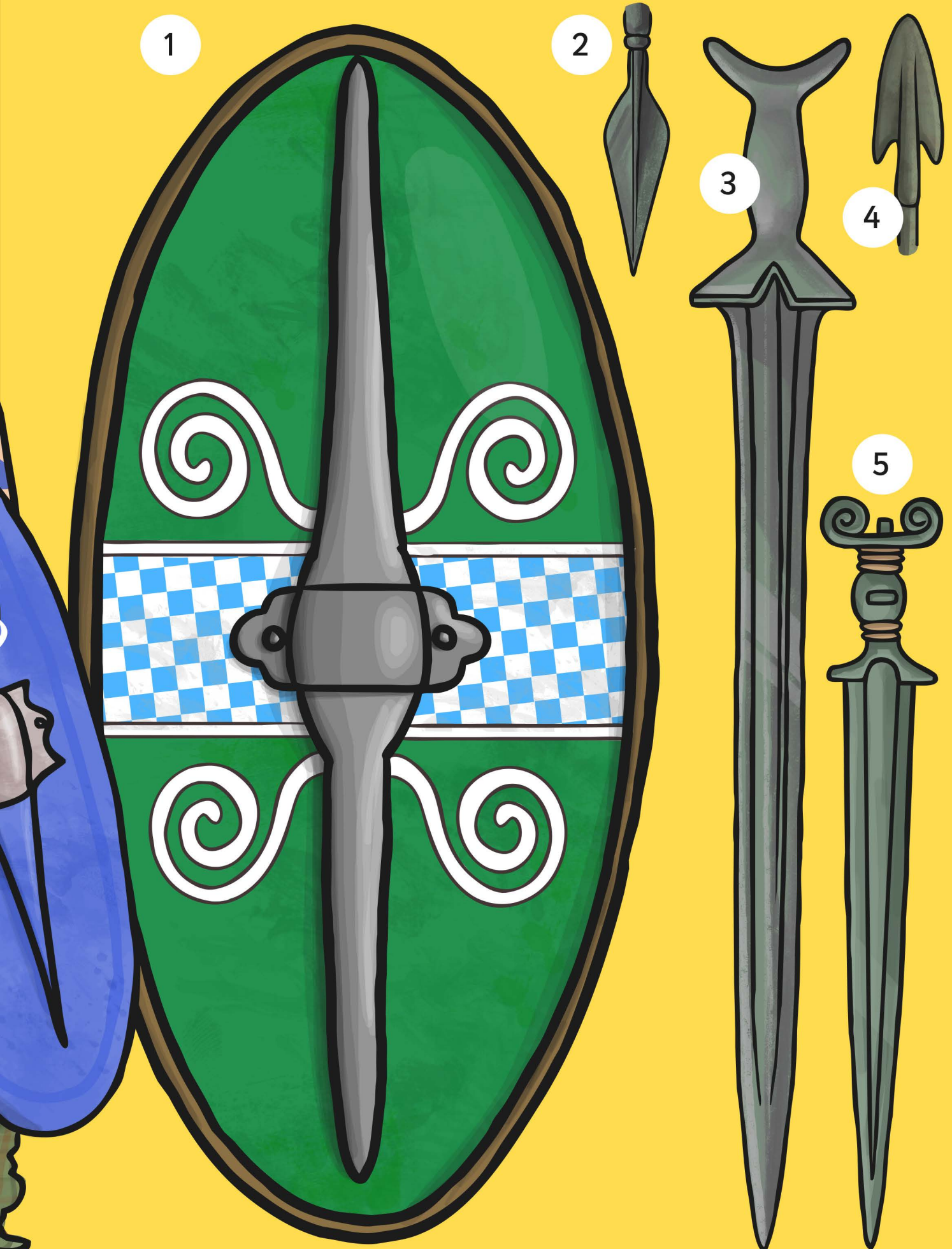
1. Oval shield

2. Iron Spearhead

3. Iron shortsword

4. Iron Arrowhead

5. Iron dagger



Religion

The Iron Age Celts believed in over four hundred gods and goddesses who they thought lived in the natural world around them, in places such as rivers, caves and woodland. Each god or goddess was thought to be responsible for controlling a certain aspect of life. The people would make sacrifices and offerings to the gods in the hope that they would be rewarded with good fortune.

The religious leaders in the Iron Age were priests who were members of the professional, learned members of society known as Druids. Little is known about these religious druids as they left no account of themselves, but we do know from the descriptions of some explorers, artists and authors, that they performed religious ceremonies and that they made offerings and sacrifices (animal and human) to the gods. The druids acted as advisers to the people and would punish those who did not follow the rules.



Farming and religion

As farming was such an important aspect of life in the Iron Age it is believed that the Iron Age religious festivals would have been closely linked to the farming calendar.

1 May

The festival of Beltane marked the beginning of the warm season when animals were put out to graze. People would pray for good weather and a good crop year.

1 August

During the festival of Lughnasadh people would pray for a good harvest.

1 November

The Samhain festival marked the end of one farming year and the beginning of the next.

1 February

In the Imbolc festival people celebrated the beginning of new life.



Piecing Together the Past

Bog bodies

The rich peat and chemical composition under the ground in certain areas has naturally preserved some bodies that were buried in the past. Many examples of Iron Age bog bodies have been found, some of which have been preserved extraordinarily well.

One such example is The Lindow Man, which was unearthed in 1984 in a peat bog at Lindow Moss in Cheshire, England. The body of the man was so well protected in the acidic, oxygen free environment under the ground, that archaeologists have been able to determine what he looked like, how healthy he was and even what he ate for his last meal! He is believed to have died between 2AD and 119AD from a vicious attack which could possibly have been a sacrificial killing carried out by druids.

The best preserved example of an Iron Age bog body is that of the Tollund Man, who was discovered in a peat bog in Denmark in 1950.



Preserved body of The Lindow Man.



Preserved body of The Tollund Man.



Artefacts

Archaeologists have uncovered many artefacts that date back to the Iron Age, giving historians an insight into the objects people used, the materials they worked with and the routines and rituals they may have performed. New discoveries continue to be made to this day, further shaping our knowledge and understanding, and helping us to appreciate what life was really like during the Iron Age.



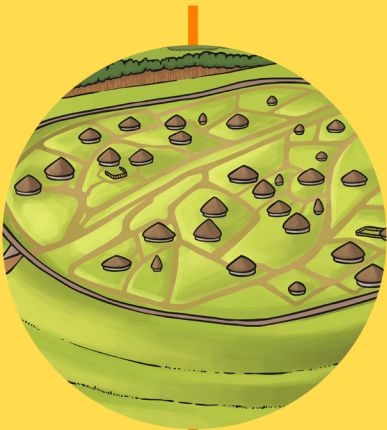
Hoard of Iron Age coins found in Suffolk.



Iron Age Comb found in 2006 .

800 - 700 BC

First hillforts are built in Britain



700 - 500 BC

Ironworking becomes more popular in Britain



Coins



Iron Age Timeline



700 BC

Settlements and farming fields start to appear



200 BC - 0 AD

Many detailed bronze and gold objects are made

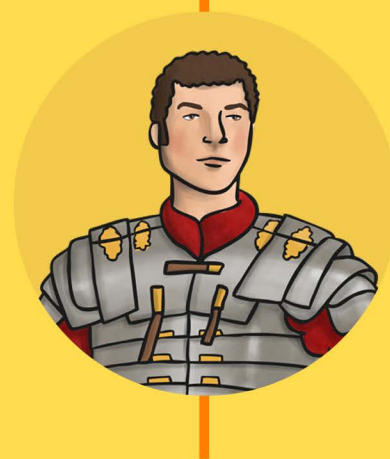
100 BC
are used for the first time



2 - 119 AD
The Lindow Man is buried



55 BC
Romans invade Britain for the first time



43 AD
Romans invade Britain

