

WAYLAND'S SMITHY

A Prehistoric
Monument in
Oxfordshire

Key Stage 2
Education Pack



Acknowledgements

This education pack was produced as part of the Historic Ridgeway Project and supported by the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme, funded by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), and administered by the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

The project has been delivered in partnership with:

- The National Trust
- English Heritage
- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- The Ridgeway National Trail
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Historic England

Special thanks to Hedley Thorne for the use of his aerial photographs.

Education pack produced by © Catherine Farnell, 2026.



Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 5 |
| How to use this resource | 6 |
| Visiting Wayland's Smithy | 7 |
| Plan of Wayland's Smithy | 8 |
| Teacher Notes: An Overview of Wayland's Smithy | 9 |
| Life in Neolithic Britain | 11 |
| What Is a Chambered Long Barrow? | 12 |
| Lesson Plans | 13 |
| Lesson Themes | 14 |
| Lesson Overviews | 15 |
| Lesson 1: Discovering Wayland's Smithy | 16 |
| Lesson 2: Exploring Wayland's Smithy (site visit) | 19 |
| Lesson 3: How Do Archaeologists Discover the Past? | 21 |
| Lesson 4: The People of Wayland's Smithy | 24 |
| Lesson 5: The Legend of Wayland's Smithy | 26 |

Activity Resources

29

| | | | |
|--|----|--|----|
| R.1 Wayland's Smithy | 31 | R.21 Specialist Report: Finds Analysis | 62 |
| R.2 Aerial Image of Wayland's Smithy | 32 | R.22 Specialist Report: Human Bones | 63 |
| R.3 The Neolithic: Britain's New Stone Age | 33 | R.23 Specialist Report: Animal Bones | 64 |
| R.4 What is Wayland's Smithy | 35 | R.24 Specialist Report: Environmental (Snails) | 65 |
| R.5 Fact, Interpretation or Legend? | 37 | R.25 Specialist Report: Dating Evidence | 66 |
| R.6 Wayland's Smithy: Inside a Long Barrow | 38 | R.26 Evidence Recording Sheet | 67 |
| R.7 Archaeological Time Periods | 39 | R.27 Evidence Recording Sheet: Example Answers | 68 |
| R.8 Timeline Cards | 41 | R.28 Draw a Person from Neolithic Wayland's Smithy | 69 |
| R.9 Wayland's Smithy Tour | 44 | R.29 The Legend of Wayland's Smithy | 70 |
| R.10 Plan Your Own Tour of Wayland's Smithy | 47 | R.30 Wayland's Smithy in 1937 | 71 |
| R.11 Ancient Landscape Detectives | 48 | R.31 Historic Map Showing Wayland Smith's Cave | 72 |
| R.12 If the Stones Could Speak | 49 | R.32 Poem About Wayland's Smithy | 73 |
| R.13 Spotting Guide | 50 | R.33 Key Vocabulary | 74 |
| R.14 How Do We Know About the Past? | 51 | | |
| R.15 Archaeology at Wayland's Smithy | 52 | | |
| R.16 Aubrey's Sketch of Wayland's Smithy in About 1670 | 53 | | |
| R.17 Neolithic Life | 54 | | |
| R.18 Neolithic Life – What Would Survive? | 55 | | |
| R.19 Archaeological Finds from Wayland's Smithy | 56 | | |
| R.20 Archaeological Finds | 57 | | |



Introduction

This educational pack introduces Key Stage 2 (KS2) pupils to Wayland's Smithy, a remarkable Neolithic burial monument. Designed for teachers, it provides a range of activities and resources to support learning about prehistoric life, archaeology and the monument itself.

Wayland's Smithy is an impressive Neolithic burial chamber and an important feature of the prehistoric landscape. Situated near the Ridgeway in Oxfordshire, this long barrow offers a fascinating insight into the lives and beliefs of people in the Neolithic period.

The site can be explored via public footpaths, allowing visitors to experience the monument and its surrounding landscape. As a Scheduled Monument, Wayland's Smithy is nationally significant and protected as part of Britain's heritage.

This education pack highlights the importance of Wayland's Smithy and offers a variety of activities to help pupils explore its history, archaeology and the people who built it.

Photo credit: Hedley Thorne

How to Use This Resource

This pack provides a series of activities designed to help pupils explore Wayland's Smithy and the prehistoric landscape around it. The activities encourage children to investigate the site, imagine life in the Neolithic period and discover the stories connected to the monument.

Designed for Key Stage 2 pupils, some activities can be carried out during a visit to Wayland's Smithy, while others are suitable for classroom use. Teachers may choose to follow the lessons in sequence or select individual activities to suit their teaching needs.

The pack links primarily to the History curriculum, with additional opportunities to explore Geography, Science, Art and Design, and English. Each lesson highlights curriculum connections to support planning and classroom learning.

Teacher notes provide background information about Wayland's Smithy and practical guidance for delivering the activities. These notes help teachers introduce pupils to the monument and bring the Neolithic landscape and its stories to life.

Photo credit: Hedley Thorne



Visiting Wayland's Smithy

Wayland's Smithy can be explored via public footpaths, offering visitors the chance to experience this Neolithic long barrow and its ancient landscape. The site is a Scheduled Monument managed by the charity English Heritage on behalf of the nation. English Heritage's role is to conserve the site for future generations and ensure it remains accessible to the public for free, with the surrounding land managed by the National Trust on their behalf. This ensures the monument is carefully preserved for both conservation and public enjoyment, with access provided along a designated route around the barrow. Schools are encouraged to visit, giving pupils the opportunity to connect with the prehistoric environment and explore a site that was significant to the people who built it over 5,000 years ago.

Site location

Wayland's Smithy, Ashbury, Oxfordshire
(near the Ridgeway National Trail)

What3words: ///hence.ignore.trapdoor

Grid reference: SU 28093 85394

Postcode for nearest car park (White Horse Hill National Trust car park): SN7 7QJ – often used as a starting point for visits. It is about a 1.5 mile walk along the Ridgeway from the Uffington White Horse.

What is there to see?

Wayland's Smithy is a Neolithic long barrow, built over 5,000 years ago as a communal burial monument. The stone chambers and earth mound are visible and well preserved. Visitors can walk around the monument and look into the burial chambers, helping children to understand how the site was constructed and used.

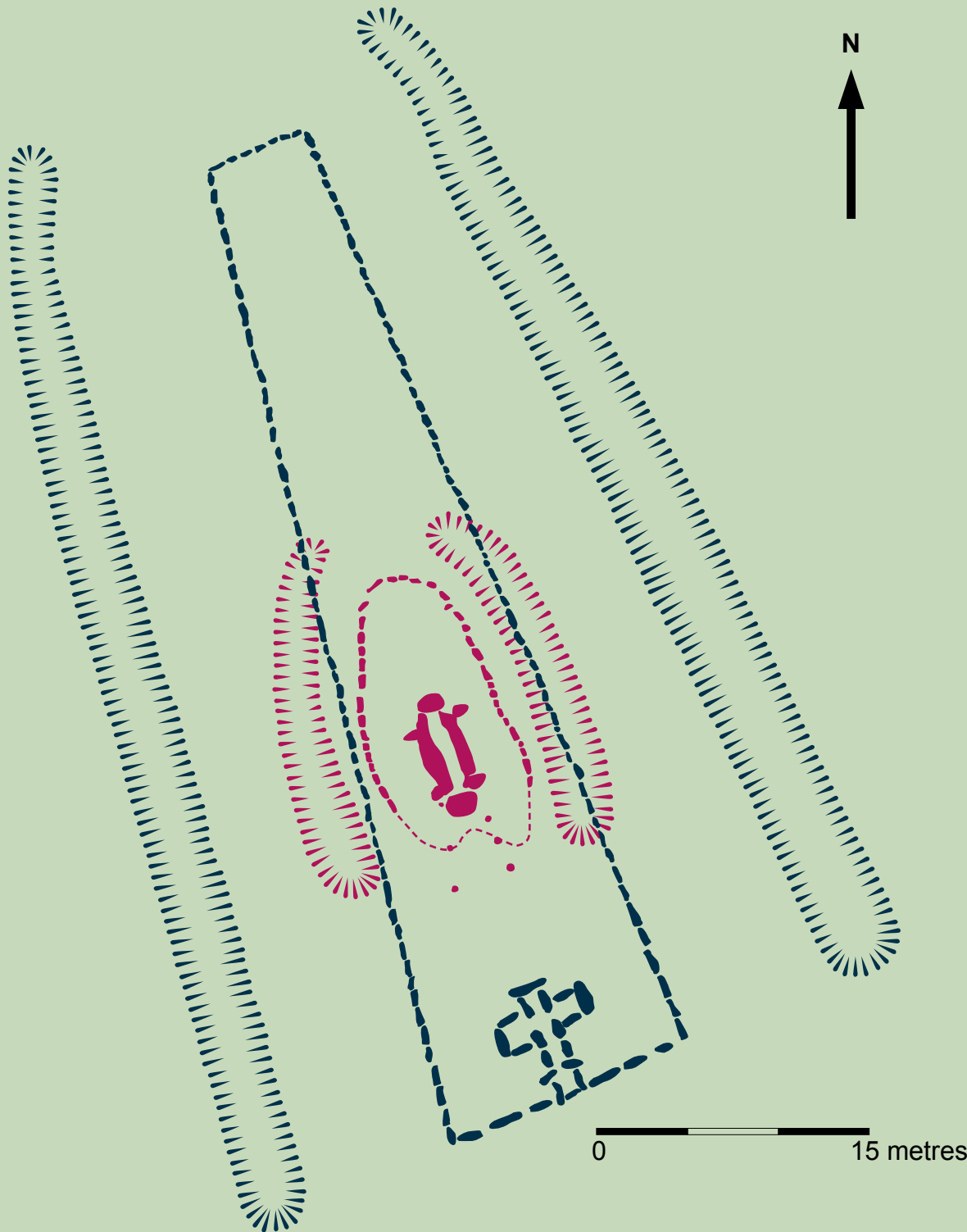
The open setting and surrounding landscape make it an ideal place to discuss prehistoric life, beliefs about death, and the importance of monuments in the Neolithic period. With careful observation and imagination, pupils can begin to picture how Wayland's Smithy may have been used and why it was built in this location.

Please note

- Wayland's Smithy is open to the public and free to visit; please remain on designated paths.
- The stones and chambers should not be climbed on. They are fragile and can be easily damaged.
- There are no toilets or on-site facilities.
- Please follow the Countryside Code and leave the site as you find it.

Wayland's Smithy is designated as a Scheduled Monument, meaning it is nationally important and protected by law. Activities such as digging, fire lighting, metal detecting, or disturbing the ground are not permitted.

Plan of Wayland's Smithy



Key

////// Sloping ground showing the ditches

Stones

Earlier barrow (no longer visible)

Later long barrow (still visible)

Drawing created based on plan by Historic England
© Historic England Archives



Teacher Notes: An Overview of Wayland's Smithy

What is Wayland's Smithy?

Wayland's Smithy is a Neolithic chambered long barrow, a type of prehistoric burial monument located near Ashbury in Oxfordshire and set above the Berkshire Downs along the ancient Ridgeway track. It dates back over 5,000 years, to between about 3590 BC and 3400 BC, placing it firmly in the Early Neolithic period, around the time when farming first spread into Britain.

The name "Wayland's Smithy" is not from the Neolithic: it was given much later, probably by Saxon settlers. They associated the mound with Wayland (or Weland), a legendary smith-god of Germanic mythology. According to later folklore, the invisible smith would re-shoe a traveller's horse if left there overnight with a small coin.

How and why was it built?

The long barrow at Wayland's Smithy was created in two main phases:

Photo credit: Hedley Thorne

First phase (around 3590–3555 BC): A smaller wooden and stone burial structure was constructed. This contained the remains of at least 14 people, men, women and a child, showing it was a communal burial place rather than for just one individual.

Second phase (around 3460–3400 BC): The earlier mound was enclosed within a much larger barrow, built as a long, trapezoidal mound of chalk and earth edged with sarsen stones. At its southern end is a stone façade and a narrow passage leading to burial chambers with smaller side compartments, a distinctive layout seen in long barrows.

The barrow you see today is the remains of this later phase. It was excavated and partly restored during archaeological work in the 1960s to help preserve and reveal how it originally looked.

What does the monument tell us?

Wayland's Smithy was a funerary monument, likely used for burial rituals and possibly remembered by later communities long after it fell out of use. The presence of multiple burials suggests a close connection between people and ancestors, and the effort required to build such a structure implies cooperation and shared belief systems within early farming communities.

Although long barrows like this were built over centuries across Europe, Wayland's Smithy is part of a local variant known as the Severn-Cotswold group, which are particularly associated with south-west Britain.

Later history and traditions

Wayland's Smithy has been part of the cultural landscape for thousands of years after its construction. Its first recorded name appears in Saxon records from around AD 955, showing that people in the early medieval period already recognised it as an ancient place worth naming.

Over time, folk traditions and legends grew up around the site. The association with Wayland the Smith – a mythical figure linked to metalworking and magic – influenced local folklore and the monument's name. Although these stories are much later than the actual construction, they show how ancient monuments can attract meanings and stories long after their original use.

Why it matters

Wayland's Smithy is a Scheduled Monument, protected by law because of its archaeological and historical importance. It gives us an important glimpse into Neolithic life, community practices, and beliefs in prehistoric Britain. Visiting and studying sites like this helps pupils understand how societies worked long ago and how people interacted with the landscape. It remains an essential part of the region's heritage and offers key insights into life during the Neolithic.

Further Information

To learn more about Wayland's Smithy and access to the site, please visit:
<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/waylands-smithy/>

References

Whittle, A, 'Wayland's Smithy, Oxfordshire: excavations at the Neolithic tomb in 1962–63 by RJC Atkinson and S Piggott', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 57:2 (1991), 61–101

Whittle, A, Bayliss, A and Wysocki, M, 'Once in a lifetime: the date of the Wayland's Smithy long barrow', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 17 (2007), Supplement S1: 103–21

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1008409>

Thurnam, J, 'On Wayland's Smithy and on the traditions connected with it', *Wiltshire Archaeology and Natural History Magazine*, 7 (1862), 321–33

Life in Neolithic Britain

The Neolithic period in Britain began around 4000 BC and marks a major turning point in human history. During this time, people gradually changed from living as hunter-gatherers to becoming early farmers. This shift transformed how communities lived, worked, and shaped the landscape.

Neolithic people began to grow crops, such as wheat and barley, and keep animals, including cattle, sheep, and pigs. Farming meant that communities settled in one place for longer periods, leading to more permanent homes and shared working of the land. Forests were cleared to create fields, and people developed new tools made from stone, wood, and bone to help with farming and building.

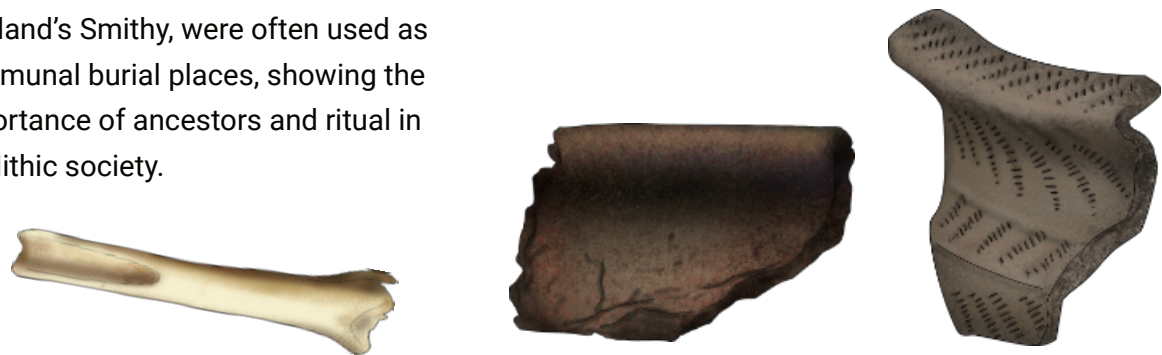
People lived in small farming communities, often in simple houses made from wood, wattle and daub, with thatched roofs. These homes were usually built close to fields, water sources, and grazing land.

Archaeological evidence suggests that settlements were sometimes temporary or moved over time as soil became less fertile. Although very few Neolithic houses survive today, clues from postholes, tools, and rubbish pits help archaeologists understand where and how people lived.

The Neolithic period is also known for the construction of monuments, including long barrows, causewayed enclosures, and stone circles. These structures required large groups of people to work together, suggesting strong community organisation and shared beliefs. Long barrows, like Wayland's Smithy, were often used as communal burial places, showing the importance of ancestors and ritual in Neolithic society.

Although Neolithic people did not leave written records, archaeologists have learned a great deal from monuments, tools, and human remains. Evidence suggests that ceremonies, seasonal gatherings, and storytelling may have played an important role in community life.

Studying Neolithic Britain helps pupils understand how early farming communities lived, how people interacted with the natural environment, and why monuments like Wayland's Smithy were built and remembered long after their original use.



Archaeological finds from Wayland's Smithy. Left to right: bone made into a scoop, Neolithic pottery fragments

What Is a Chambered Long Barrow?

A chambered long barrow is one of the earliest types of monumental architecture in prehistoric Britain, built during the Neolithic period more than 5,000 years ago. These elongated mounds of earth and stone were constructed as communal burial monuments and are among the oldest surviving structures in the British landscape. Long barrows often take a trapezoidal shape, with the higher and wider end sometimes forming an entrance or forecourt area leading into one or more burial chambers. These chambers were made from timber or large stone slabs and were places where the remains of people from the local community were placed alongside occasional grave goods.

The ditches flanking the mound provided material for building the barrow and also marked the monument as a special place in the landscape. Burial practices varied between communities, but in many cases long barrows were reopened over time to add new burials, reflecting changing rituals

and beliefs about death and ancestors. Archaeological evidence shows that long barrows were important places for both the living and the dead, acting as focal points for ceremony and memory.

Many long barrows, including those with stone chambers like Wayland's Smithy, belong to regional traditions such as the Severn-Cotswold group, which appear across south-west Britain and share similar construction techniques. Today, long barrows survive as protected sites that help

us understand early farming societies, their beliefs, and how prehistoric communities shaped and used the land.

Further Exploration

Wayland's Smithy is a 'Cotswold-Severn' type tomb. English Heritage manages several other impressive tombs of this type that you can visit, including a group in Gloucestershire: Belas Knap, Arthur's Stone, Nympsfield, Uley (Hetty Pegler's Tump), and Rodmarton Long Barrow. There is also Arthur's Stone in Herefordshire and West Kennet in Wiltshire.



Photo showing the entrance to the burial chamber at Wayland's Smithy. Photo credit: Hedley Thorne



Wayland's Smithy Lesson Plans



Lesson Themes

The following pages outline five lessons designed to help pupils explore Wayland's Smithy. The lessons can be taught in order as a sequence, or used independently. Each lesson includes a selection of suggested activities supported by resources in the Activity Resources section (page 29). Teachers may wish to choose the activities most appropriate for the time available and the age of their pupils.

Lesson 2, *Exploring Wayland's Smithy*, includes activities intended for use during a visit to Wayland's Smithy. Information about visiting the site can be found on page 7. It may be helpful to introduce pupils to the monument using the activities in Lesson 1 before the visit.

The resources included in the Activity Resources section can also be used flexibly. Teachers may choose to combine activities from different lessons or adapt them to create their own tailored sessions.

Lesson themes

- Lesson 1 Discovering Wayland's Smithy
- Lesson 2 Exploring Wayland's Smithy (site visit)
- Lesson 3 How Do Archaeologists Discover the Past?
- Lesson 4 The People of Wayland's Smithy
- Lesson 5 The Legend of Wayland's Smithy

Lesson Overviews

1. Discovering Wayland's Smithy

In this lesson pupils are introduced to Wayland's Smithy, a Neolithic chambered long barrow over 5,000 years old. They learn about the Neolithic period and place the monument within a historical timeline, helping them understand when it was built and how life in Britain was changing as people moved from hunting and gathering to farming.

2. Exploring Wayland's Smithy

This lesson takes place during a visit to Wayland's Smithy. Pupils explore the monument and surrounding landscape through observation and fieldwork. They investigate the structure of the long barrow, consider how it may have been built, and explore the relationship between the monument and its environment.

For site access and practical visit information, see page 7.

3. How Do Archaeologists Discover the Past?

In this lesson pupils explore how archaeologists discover and interpret evidence from the past. They learn about the role of archaeologists and how Wayland's Smithy has been studied over time. Using a reconstruction of Neolithic life, pupils consider why only some materials survive in the ground. They then examine archaeological finds from Wayland's Smithy and use observation and discussion to suggest what the objects might be and what they reveal about life in the Neolithic period.

4. The People of Wayland's Smithy

Pupils investigate what life may have been like for the people who built and used Wayland's Smithy. They examine archaeological evidence, including human bones, artefacts, animal remains and environmental data, to reconstruct aspects of Neolithic life.

5. The Legend of Wayland the Smith

In this lesson pupils explore the legend of Wayland the Smith, a mythical blacksmith later associated with Wayland's Smithy. They investigate how stories and myths develop around ancient places when the original history is forgotten or uncertain. Pupils compare archaeological knowledge about the monument with later folklore and literary retellings before creating their own imaginative legends inspired by the site.

Lesson 1 Discovering Wayland's Smithy

Lesson Overview

In this lesson pupils are introduced to Wayland's Smithy, a Neolithic chambered long barrow over 5,000 years old. They learn about the Neolithic period and place the monument within a historical timeline, helping them understand when it was built and how life in Britain was changing as people moved from hunting and gathering to farming.

Lesson Aim

Introduce pupils to Wayland's Smithy as a Neolithic chambered long barrow and place it within a wider prehistoric timeline.

Objective 1.1

Identify Wayland's Smithy as a Neolithic monument built for burial and remembrance.

Place Wayland's Smithy within a chronological timeline of British prehistory and later periods.

Describe some ways life changed in Britain during the Neolithic, including farming, monument building and landscape change.

Ask historically valid questions about why Wayland's Smithy was built and what it may have meant to the people who used it.

National Curriculum links

History: changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age.

History: develop a chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British history.

History: understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources.

English (spoken language): ask relevant questions, articulate and justify answers, and participate in discussion.

Resources

R.1 Wayland's Smithy

R.2 Aerial Image of Wayland's Smithy

R.3 The Neolithic: Britain's New Stone Age (4000–2400 BC)

R.4 What is Wayland's Smithy

R.5 Fact, Interpretation or Legend?

R.6 Wayland's Smithy: Inside a Long Barrow

R.7 Archaeological Time Periods

R.8 Timeline Cards

Teaching Sequence

Introducing Wayland's Smithy

- Share photographs of Wayland's Smithy with the class, R.1 and R.2.

Begin by asking pupils:

- What do you think Wayland's Smithy might be?
- Who might have built it?
- How old do you think it is?

Encourage pupils to suggest ideas based on what they can see in the photograph.

Next, ask the class to generate their own questions about the site. Record these on the board.

Share the information in R.4 with the class. Pupils can either read the information independently or review it together as a group. Discuss whether the information answers any of their original questions and identify any new questions that pupils may now have.

Extra Activity: Fact, Fiction or Legend

- Extend pupils' understanding by playing Fact, Fiction or Legend.

Present pupils with a series of statements about Wayland's Smithy.

Pupils decide whether each statement is:

- a fact, supported by archaeological evidence
- fiction, something that is not true or has been invented
- a legend, a traditional story associated with the site, such as the tale of Wayland the Smith

Discuss how historians and archaeologists use evidence to distinguish between facts, stories and interpretations about the past.

Introducing the Neolithic Period

- If pupils have not previously studied the Neolithic (New Stone Age), introduce the period using R.3.
- Explain that the Neolithic was a time

- when people in Britain began farming, living in settled communities and building monuments such as long barrows.
- Discuss how these changes affected people's daily lives.

Timelines

- Introduce the concept of a timeline and explain why historians use them. Timelines help us understand the order of events, show how things have changed over time, and place important events within a wider historical context.
- Explain that history is often divided into different time periods, each with its own name.

Ordering Archaeological Time Periods

- Provide pupils with strips of paper showing different archaeological time periods (R.7).
- Ask pupils to:

- Cut out the strips.
 - Arrange them in chronological order.
 - Join them together to create a long timeline of archaeological periods.
 - Once the timeline has been assembled, review key terminology such as BC/AD and BCE/CE, explaining how these systems help us measure time.
 - Discuss why earlier periods are often named after materials or technologies, such as the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age, while more recent periods are sometimes named after rulers or historical events (because written records become more common).

Create a Wayland's Smithy Timeline

- The timeline cards provide a brief overview of events connected with Wayland's Smithy and when they occurred.
 - Review the cards together as a class.
 - Pupils can then:
 - use the cards to create a class display timeline, or
 - make their own individual timelines.
 - If possible, take the timeline cards outside and create a human timeline.
 - Use 1 metre to represent 100 years.
 - Mark the start of the timeline and pace out approximately 56 metres to show how far back in time Wayland's Smithy was first built. This helps pupils visualise the length of time since the monument was constructed.

Plenary

- Bring the class back together and review what pupils have learned.
 - Ask pupils:
 - When was Wayland's Smithy built?
 - Which historical period does it belong to?
 - What new questions do you have about the site?
 - Return to the questions pupils generated at the start of the lesson and discuss whether any have been answered.

Lesson 2 Exploring Wayland's Smithy (site visit)

Lesson Overview

This lesson takes place during a visit to Wayland's Smithy. Pupils explore the monument and surrounding landscape through observation and fieldwork. They investigate the structure of the long barrow, consider how it may have been built, and explore the relationship between the monument and its environment.

Lesson Aim

Use first-hand observation at the monument to help pupils notice physical features, landscape change, chronology and the relationship between heritage and nature.

Objective 1.1

Identify key visible features of Wayland's Smithy, including the mound, ditch lines, façade stones and chamber entrance.

Observe and record features of the surrounding landscape and classify them as natural or human-made.

Use evidence from the site to suggest how Wayland's Smithy and its landscape may have changed over time.

Place Wayland's Smithy within a longer historical timeline, from the Neolithic period to the present day.

Recognise that historic monuments exist within living landscapes that support plants and wildlife.

National Curriculum links

History

Changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age.

A local history study.

Develop a chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British history.

Understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources.

Geography

Describe and understand key aspects of physical geography, including hills, vegetation and land use.

Understand how environments can change over time.

Use fieldwork to observe, measure, record and present the human and physical features in the local area.

Science (Working Scientifically)

Identify and classify plants and animals.

Record findings using drawings, labelled diagrams and tables.

Resources

R.9 Wayland's Smithy Tour

R.10 Plan Your Own Tour of Wayland's Smithy

R.11 Ancient Landscape Detectives

R.12 If the Stones Could Speak

R.13 Spotting Guide

Teaching Sequence

Self-led tour

- Use R.9 as a guide to explore Wayland's Smithy with your class. As you walk around the site, encourage pupils to observe the monument and surrounding landscape carefully. Following the Wayland's Smithy walking tour, guide pupils to investigate features such as the large façade stones, the entrance to the burial chambers, the shape of the mound and the wider Ridgeway landscape.

By the end of the tour, pupils should understand how the monument was built, how it may have been used and why places like Wayland's Smithy are important for learning about the past.

Optional extension: Use R.10 to support pupils in developing their own tour of the site, highlighting features they think are particularly interesting or important.

Ancient Landscape Detectives

- Pupils become landscape detectives, exploring how the area around Wayland's Smithy has changed since it was built.

- Using the activity sheet R.11, pupils observe the landscape and record what they notice through drawings or notes. They identify natural features that may have existed in Neolithic times (such as hills or soil) and human-made features that show how people have changed the landscape more recently (such as fences, paths, planted trees, or signs).

This activity encourages pupils to think about how landscapes change over time and how historic sites sit within modern environments.

If Stones Could Speak

- The stones at Wayland's Smithy have stood for over 5,000 years. In this activity, pupils imagine the many events the monument may have witnessed over time.

Using the activity sheet R.12, pupils draw or write different moments from the past inside each stone shape. These might include Neolithic people building the tomb, later farmers working nearby, Victorian visitors exploring the mound, archaeologists studying the site, or

- tourists visiting today.

This activity encourages pupils to think creatively about how historic places connect many different moments in history.

Nature Spotting

- Using the spotting guide R.13, pupils explore the natural environment around Wayland's Smithy and record the wildlife they observe. Encourage them to look carefully for plants, insects, birds and other small creatures living around the monument.

Pupils can also search for different colours and textures in nature, such as rough bark, soft leaves or spiky plants. Careful observation is an important skill for archaeologists, who study landscapes and small clues to understand how people used places in the past. This activity helps pupils practise observation while recognising that historic sites like Wayland's Smithy are also living landscapes that support a variety of wildlife.

Lesson 3 How Do Archaeologists Discover the Past?

Lesson Overview

In this lesson pupils explore how archaeologists discover and interpret evidence from the past. They learn about the role of archaeologists and how Wayland's Smithy has been studied over time. Using a reconstruction of Neolithic life, pupils consider why only some materials survive in the ground. They then examine archaeological finds from Wayland's Smithy and use observation and discussion to suggest what the objects might be and what they reveal about life in the Neolithic period.

Lesson Aim

Develop pupils' understanding of archaeology by exploring the role of archaeologists and the artefacts they found at Wayland's Smithy.

Objective 1.1

- Explain what archaeology is and describe how archaeologists investigate the past.
- Recognise that not all evidence survives in the ground and explain why some materials decay.
- Use careful observation to suggest what archaeological finds might be and how they may have been used.
- Understand that archaeologists combine different types of evidence to build knowledge about places such as Wayland's Smithy.

National Curriculum links

Understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources.

Changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age.

Science – Properties and Changes of Materials (Upper KS2)

Compare and group together everyday materials on the basis of their properties.

English (spoken language)

Articulate and justify answers.

Ask relevant questions.

Participate in discussions to explore ideas.

Resources

- R.14 How Do We Know About the Past?
- R.15 Archaeology at Wayland's Smithy
- R.16 Aubrey's Sketch of Wayland's Smithy in About 1670
- R.17 Neolithic Life
- R.18 Neolithic Life – What Would Survive?
- R.19 Archaeological Finds from Wayland's Smithy
- R.20 Archaeological Finds

Teaching Sequence

What is archaeology?

- Begin by asking pupils:
If people living 5,000 years ago did not write things down, how do we know about their lives?
Explain that we learn about the past through archaeology, the study of the traces people leave behind.
Use R.14 to introduce archaeology.
Explain that archaeologists study the past by investigating evidence such as monuments, objects, bones and environmental remains.

Early Records of Wayland's Smithy

- Use R.15 to explain that Wayland's Smithy has interested people for many centuries. The first written record of the site dates from the 1670s (see R.16).
Explain that early records often described monuments but did not investigate them scientifically. More

- recently, archaeologists have used careful excavation techniques and detailed recording to study sites like Wayland's Smithy.
Discuss how archaeologists use the evidence they uncover to build a picture of how people lived thousands of years ago.

Not All Evidence Survives

- Show R.17, which illustrates what archaeologists think life in the Neolithic period may have been like.
Explain that although many objects were used in daily life, very little survives in the ground. Most materials decay over time.
Discuss how only certain conditions allow organic materials to survive, such as waterlogged environments or very dry conditions.
Using R.18, discuss which materials are more likely to survive and which are likely to decay.

- Likely to survive: stone, pottery, bone, antler, charcoal from fires.
Likely to decay: wood, baskets, food remains (unless charred), thatch, leather, wool clothing.
Explain that archaeologists often have to reconstruct the past using only the materials that survive.

Activity: Mystery Objects

- Show pupils the images on Resource 19 and explain that these are objects discovered by archaeologists during excavations at Wayland's Smithy.
Ask pupils to look carefully at the objects and discuss what they think they might be.
Encourage pupils to consider what material the object might be made from. What shape it has. What it might have been used for
Pupils make a guess about each object and explain their reasoning.

- Next, give each group a selection of Wayland's Smithy find cards (R. 20). Pupils compare the mystery images with the find cards to see if they can identify the objects and suggest their possible uses.
- Explain that archaeologists often begin with objects they do not fully understand. By observing carefully, comparing evidence and discussing ideas, they can build a clearer picture of how people lived in the past.

Plenary: What Do the Finds Tell Us?

- Bring the class together and look again at the objects discovered at Wayland's Smithy.
- Explain that archaeologists study finds like these to learn about how people lived thousands of years ago.
- Ask pupils to discuss what the objects might reveal about daily life in the Neolithic period. For example:
- Explain that archaeologists combine many different pieces of evidence to build a picture of the past. Even small objects can help us understand how people lived, worked and used places like Wayland's Smithy over 5,000 years ago.

Lesson 4 The People of Wayland's Smithy

Lesson Overview

Pupils investigate what life may have been like for the people who built and used Wayland's Smithy. They examine archaeological evidence, including human bones, artefacts, animal remains and environmental data, to reconstruct aspects of Neolithic life.

Lesson Aim

To use specialist archaeological evidence to reconstruct what life may have been like for the people connected with Wayland's Smithy.

Objective 1.1

Use specialist archaeological reports to gather evidence about diet, health, animals, landscape and chronology.

Distinguish between evidence and interpretation when discussing life in the Neolithic period.

Create an evidence-based reconstruction of a person from Neolithic Wayland's Smithy.

National Curriculum links

History: understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources.

History: changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age.

History: Ask questions about evidence and use sources to build interpretations of the past.

Art and design: improve mastery of drawing and use sketching to develop and communicate ideas.

English (reading and spoken language): retrieve information from non-fiction and discuss findings using evidence.

Resources

R.21 Specialist Report: Finds Analysis

R.22 Specialist Report: Human Bones

R.23 Specialist Report: Animal Bones

R.24 Specialist Report: Environmental (Snails)

R.25 Specialist Report: Dating Evidence

R.26 Evidence Recording Sheet

R.27 Evidence Recording Sheet: Example Answers

R.28 Draw a Person from Neolithic Wayland's Smithy

Teaching Sequence

- Ask the key enquiry question:
Who were the people buried at Wayland's Smithy and what can archaeological evidence tell us about their lives?
Explain that archaeologists cannot meet the people who lived thousands of years ago. Instead, they study evidence discovered during archaeological excavations, such as bones, plant remains, animal remains, and objects left behind.
Tell pupils that today they will work like archaeologists, using specialist archaeological reports to discover information about the people buried at Wayland's Smithy.

Evidence Investigation (Group Work)

- Divide pupils into small groups.
Give each group a Specialist Report Pack (R. 21 to 25) and an Evidence Recording Sheet (R. 26).

- Explain that each report contains clues about life in the Neolithic period. Pupils should read through the reports and look for evidence that helps answer the questions on their recording sheet. (Teacher guidance and example answers are provided in R. 27).
Ask pupils to investigate:
What food did the people eat?
What was the landscape like around them?
What animals lived nearby?
How healthy were the people?
When did these people live?
What activities might they have done?
Encourage pupils to think like archaeologists by looking carefully for evidence in the reports and using it to support their ideas.

Class discussion

- Ask groups to share one piece of evidence they discovered. Record key ideas on the board.

Reconstruction drawing

- Give each pupil the worksheet: Draw a Person from Neolithic Wayland's Smithy
Pupils create a drawing of a Neolithic person in their environment, using the evidence they have discovered. Their drawing might include: the person, animals nearby, tools or activities, the surrounding landscape
Remind pupils that archaeologists base their interpretations on evidence, so their drawings should reflect what they discovered in the reports.

Plenary

- Invite a few pupils to share their drawings. Ask: What evidence did you use in your drawing? What have we learned about the people of Wayland's Smithy? What surprised you? Explain that archaeologists combine many types of evidence to build a picture of how people lived over 5,000 years ago.

Lesson 5 The Legend of Wayland's Smithy

Lesson Overview

In this lesson pupils explore the legend of Wayland the Smith, a mythical blacksmith later associated with Wayland's Smithy. They investigate how stories and myths develop around ancient places when the original history is forgotten or uncertain. Pupils compare archaeological knowledge about the monument with later folklore and literary retellings before creating their own imaginative legends inspired by the site.

Lesson Aim

To explore how later communities explained ancient monuments through folklore and storytelling, and to use this understanding to create original legends inspired by Wayland's Smithy.

Objective 1.1

Explain that the name Wayland's Smithy comes from a later Saxon legend rather than from the Neolithic period when the monument was built.
Compare archaeological evidence about the monument with later folklore, legends and literary retellings.
Plan and write an original legend inspired by Wayland's Smithy.

National Curriculum links

History
A local history study.
Understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources.
English
English – Reading (comprehension)
Read and discuss a wide range of fiction including myths, legends and traditional stories.
Writing – composition
Plan, draft and write narratives, considering how authors develop character, setting and atmosphere.

Resources

R.28 Draw a Person from Neolithic Wayland's Smithy
R.29 The Legend of Wayland's Smithy
R.30 Wayland's Smithy in 1937
R.31 Historic Map Showing Wayland Smith's Cave
R.32 Poem About Wayland's Smithy

Teaching Sequence

A Mysterious Place

- Show pupils the historic photograph Wayland's Smithy in 1937 (R. 30).
Ask pupils to look closely and discuss:
What do you notice about this place?
Does it feel mysterious or special?
Why do you think ancient places sometimes inspire stories?
Explain that many ancient monuments have inspired legends and magical stories because people wondered who built them and what happened there long ago.
Tell pupils that Wayland's Smithy is famous not only for its archaeology but also for the stories people have told about it for hundreds of years.

The Legend of Wayland's Smithy

- Read aloud The Legend of Wayland's Smithy (R.29). Explain The name of

- Wayland's Smithy has been linked to the long barrow since at least AD 955, when it was referred to as 'Weland's Smithy' in a Saxon charter.

Review the key parts of the legend:

Wayland was a legendary blacksmith from Norse and Saxon stories.

Travellers believed that if they left a coin on the stone, an invisible smith would shoe their horse overnight.

The traveller had to walk away without looking back, or the magic would fail.

Discuss:

Why do you think people created this story?

Why might blacksmiths have seemed magical in the past?

Why might travellers have liked the idea of a hidden helper?

Explain that when people did not know who built ancient monuments, they often created stories to explain them.

Stories Over Time

- Show pupils the poem about Wayland's Smithy recorded in 1862 (R.32).
Explain that this poem was written down after local villagers shared the story.
Read a few lines together:
"They say that in this cave did dwell
A smith that was invisible."
Discuss:
How does the poem describe the place?
Is the story similar to the legend we read?
Why do you think people kept retelling the story?
Explain that stories about Wayland's Smithy have been told for hundreds of years, showing how important places can continue to live on through imagination and storytelling.
You may also show the 1883 Ordnance Survey map (Resource 31) to show that

- the monument was recognised and recorded on maps long ago as Wayland Smithy's Cave.

Create Your Own Legend

- Explain that pupils will now create their own legend inspired by Wayland's Smithy.
Remind them that ancient places often inspire stories because:
 - they are mysterious
 - people want to explain them
 - they feel magical or specialTheir legend might include:
 - a mysterious character
 - magic or supernatural events
 - a traveller visiting the monument
 - a secret hidden within the stonesEncourage pupils to think about:
Who might live at Wayland's Smithy?
What magical event might happen there?

- What rule must travellers follow?
What secret might the monument hold?
Story prompts:
 - A traveller arrives at the stones at sunset...
 - A strange sound comes from inside the chamber...
 - The stones begin to glow under the moonlight...
 - A hidden guardian appears during the night...Pupils write or illustrate their own short legend.

Plenary – Why Do Stories Matter?

- Invite pupils to share parts of their legends.
Discuss:
 - What makes a good legend?
 - Why do ancient monuments inspire stories?
 - Why do you think people still visit

- Wayland's Smithy today?
Explain:
Even though archaeologists now study monuments scientifically, stories are still an important way people connect with places.
Places like Wayland's Smithy remain important because people continue to tell stories about them, visit them, and imagine what happened there long ago.
The legend of Wayland's Smithy shows how history, imagination and storytelling can keep a place alive for thousands of years.



Wayland's Smithy Activity resources



Wayland's Smithy

Wayland's Smithy, looking north towards the entrance to the burial chamber.

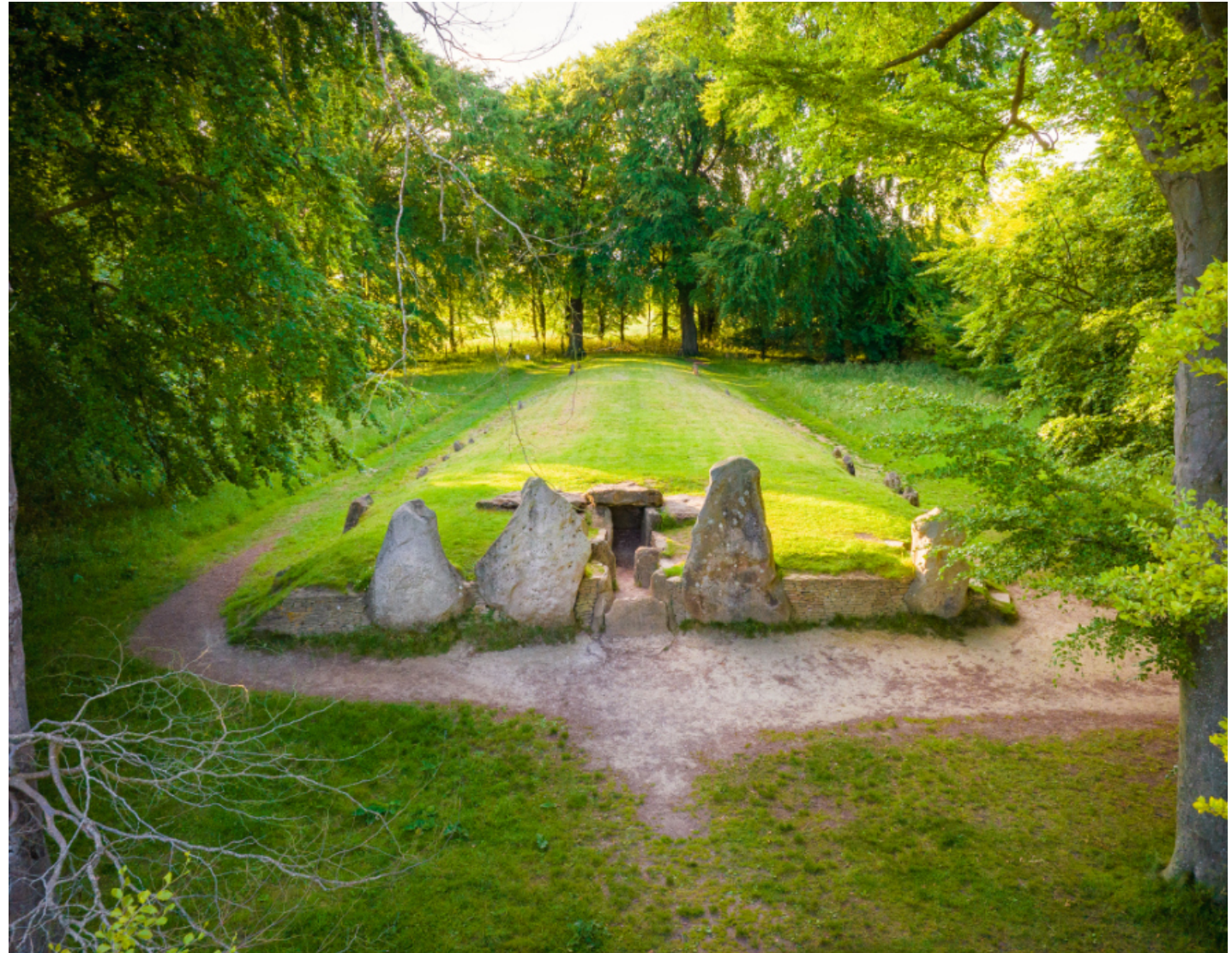


Photo credit: Hedley Thorne

Aerial image of Wayland's Smithy



Credit: Hedley Thorne

The Neolithic: Britain's New Stone Age (4000–2400 BC)

When Did the Neolithic Begin?

The Neolithic period began in Britain around 4000 BC. It was part of the Stone Age, a time before metal tools were invented. The word Neolithic means "New Stone Age" and it was a time of huge change.

From Hunters to Farmers

Before this period, people in Britain were hunters and gatherers. They moved from place to place, hunting wild animals, fishing and collecting plants, nuts and berries.

Around 4000 BC, new ideas arrived from Europe. People began farming.

They grew crops such as wheat and barley. They kept animals like cattle, sheep and pigs. For the first time, farming meant people could produce their own food instead of relying only on what they could find. This changed the way people lived.

Shaping the Land

People did not immediately settle in permanent villages, but they moved within set territories. Over time, they cleared forests to create farmland. Fields appeared where woodland had once stood.



Scene showing life in the Neolithic

Neolithic people built houses with timber frames and wattle and daub (woven sticks, clay, mud, and straw) walls. They made polished stone axes for cutting trees and shaping timber. They made pottery to cook and store food.

Gradually, farming reshaped the landscape.

Building Monuments

The Neolithic was also a time when people began building large monuments.

Across southern Britain, communities constructed long barrows (burial mounds), stone tombs, earthworks and, later, stone circles. These monuments took planning, organisation and skilled labour. They show that Neolithic people worked together in organised groups.

Many of these monuments were burial places. Instead of burying people in small graves, communities built

impressive mounds of earth and stone where several people were placed. These were not just graves. They were important places in the landscape, places to gather, remember the dead, and perhaps carry out ceremonies.

Sacred Landscapes

Some monuments were built again and again in the same areas. Over time, these places became what archaeologists call sacred landscapes, areas filled with monuments that remained important for hundreds of years.

These landmarks helped communities mark their territory and connect themselves to the past.



How Do We Know?

The Neolithic is part of prehistory, which means there are no written records from this time.

Everything we know comes from archaeology, from bones, tools, pottery and the remains of buildings found in the ground.

Modern scientific techniques, such as radiocarbon dating and DNA analysis, help archaeologists work out when monuments were built and learn more about the people who lived then.

Why the Neolithic Still Matters

The Neolithic period lasted until about 2400 BC, when metal tools began to appear and the Bronze Age began.

But the changes that began in the Neolithic shaped everything that followed. Farming transformed the landscape. Forests were cleared. Fields

were created. Communities began to define territories and return to important places again and again.

Most striking of all were the monuments. Long barrows, stone tombs and circles were built to honour the dead and to mark special places in the land. These structures were not accidental or simple. They were carefully planned and built by groups of people working together.

Places like Wayland's Smithy were part of this new way of living – a time when people were settling, farming and creating lasting marks on the landscape. When we study the Neolithic, we are learning about the moment when Britain began to look more like the countryside we recognise today.



Left: Neolithic pottery and flint tools
Above: polished stone axe

What is Wayland's Smithy?

Wayland's Smithy is a very ancient burial monument in Oxfordshire. It was first built about 5,600 years ago, during the Neolithic period.

Today, visitors see a long mound of earth and chalk called a long barrow. At one end is a stone burial chamber made from huge sarsen stones. The stones you see now were carefully rebuilt in 1965, based on archaeological evidence, but the original monument was built between about 3460 and 3400 BC.

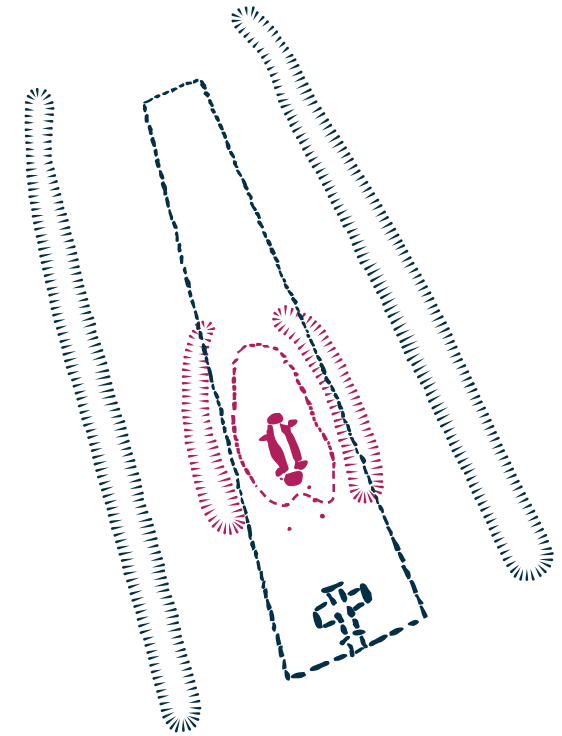


Credit: Hedley Thorne

Was this the first monument here?

No. Archaeologists have discovered that an earlier burial site stood on this spot.

Excavations revealed an older mound beneath the one we see today. Inside it was a wooden and stone chamber containing the remains of 14 people: 11 men, two women and a child. These burials took place between about 3590 and 3555 BC.



This is a plan of Wayland's Smithy. The red shows the first burial mound, and the dark blue shows the later burial built on top, which we can still see today.

The first monument seems to have been used for only a short time, perhaps no more than 15 years. Some of the skeletons show signs of violent deaths, including arrow wounds. Others may have died from illness. After a generation or two, the mound was covered over.

Later, people returned and built a much larger barrow on top. Around 10 more people were buried in this second monument. Broken Neolithic pottery was also placed there. The large stones at the entrance may have been added to make the monument more impressive and to honour the past.

Why is it called Wayland's Smithy?

The monument is far older than its name. In a Saxon land charter from AD 955, it was called "Weland's Smithy". Wayland was a legendary blacksmith from Germanic and Scandinavian stories. In the legend, he was a master metalworker with almost magical skills.

People once believed that if a traveller left their horse and a coin at the monument overnight, an invisible blacksmith would shoe the horse by morning.

In Saxon times, metalworking was seen as mysterious and powerful. The huge stones may have reminded people of a giant's workshop, so the legend became attached to this place. Similar stories are told about ancient monuments in other parts of Europe.

What does it tell us about the Neolithic?

Wayland's Smithy shows that Neolithic communities built large monuments to bury and remember their dead. These structures took planning, cooperation and skill. They were placed in visible locations along important routes, such as the Ridgeway, so they would stand out in the landscape.

Modern science shows the monument was used for a shorter time than once thought. This suggests it may have been built to remember people known to the community, rather than very distant ancestors.

Why does it still matter?

People have been interested in Wayland's Smithy for hundreds of years. It was drawn in the 1600s by the antiquarian John Aubrey. It has inspired writers such as Rudyard Kipling and Susan Cooper, and was one of the first monuments protected by law in 1882.

More than 5,000 years later, it still stands in the landscape. It helps us connect with the people who first farmed this land and built places to be remembered.



Credit: Hedley Thorne

Fact, Interpretation or Legend?

Read each statement carefully.

Decide whether it is:

Fact - Something discovered or recorded that can be checked.

Interpretation - An idea about what the evidence might mean.

Legend - A traditional story from the past that may include real places or people, but cannot be proven and often contains magical, imagined, or exaggerated elements.

F = Fact

I = Interpretation

L = Legend

Write F I or L next to each one.

1. The first monument contained the remains of 14 people.
2. Some skeletons showed signs of arrow wounds.
3. The monument was used for only about 15 years.
4. The people buried there may have died during a battle.
5. A magical blacksmith repaired horses there overnight.
6. The site was called "Weland's Smithy" in AD 955.
7. The large stones were probably added to honour those who died.
8. The second, larger barrow was built over an earlier one.
9. Around 10 more people were buried in the second monument.
10. Neolithic communities worked together to build large monuments.
11. The stones you see today were carefully rebuilt in 1965.
12. Metalworking was seen as powerful and mysterious in Saxon times.
13. Archaeologists think the builders wanted to show a connection to their ancestors.
14. Wayland, the blacksmith, made the long barrow his home.

Inside a Long Barrow

What is a long barrow?

A long barrow is a very old monument built by Neolithic people over 5,000 years ago. It was a special place for burials and ceremonies.

They are important because they help us understand how Neolithic people lived.

They show that early farmers had strong beliefs about death and ancestors.

They give clues about community life, teamwork, and early engineering skills.

Parts of a long barrow

This is a plan of the later long barrow built at Wayland's Smithy

Ditches -

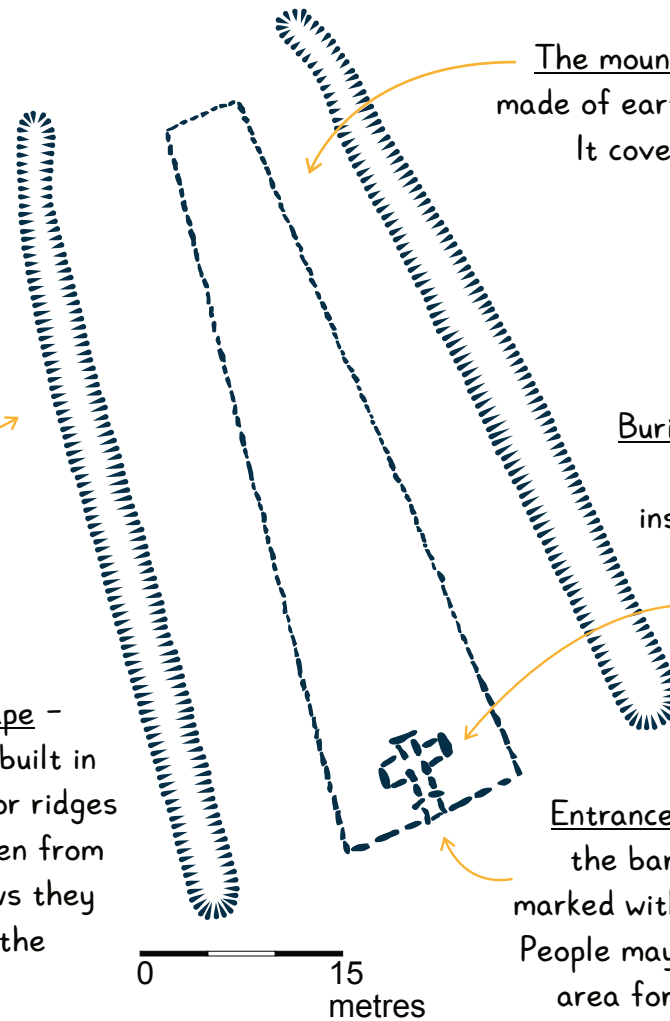
Trenches dug along the sides of the mound. The soil was used to build the mound and marked it as a special place.

The mound - A long hill made of earth and stones. It covers the burials.

Burial chambers - Small spaces inside the mound where people's bones were placed.

Surrounding landscape - Long barrows were built in places like hilltops or ridges so they could be seen from far away. This shows they were important for the community.

Entrance - The front of the barrow, sometimes marked with larger stones. People may have used this area for special events.



Archaeological time periods

Cut out the paper-chain pieces and link them together in chronological order, starting with the oldest archaeological time period.

| | | |
|------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Glue | Middle Stone Age Mesolithic | 10,000 BC–4000 BC |
| Glue | Roman | AD 43–AD 410 |
| Glue | 21st century | 2000 to present |
| Glue | New Stone Age Neolithic | 4000 BC–2400 BC |
| Glue | 20th century | 1900–1999 |

| | | |
|------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Glue | Old Stone Age Palaeolithic | 1,000,000–10,000 |
| Glue | Iron Age | 800 BC–AD 43 |
| Glue | Bronze Age | 2400 BC–800 BC |
| Glue | Post Medieval | 1540–1900 |
| Glue | Medieval | 1066–1540 |
| Glue | Early Medieval/Anglo-Saxon | AD 410–1066 |

Timeline cards

These cards tell the story of Wayland's Smithy, a Neolithic chambered long barrow, built as a place to bury the dead. The pink-topped cards show when people were using it for burials.

Cut out the cards and put them in the right order to make a timeline of its history.

Early Stone Age

Palaeolithic

1,000,000 BC–10,000 BC

The first people reached Britain during warmer Ice Age periods. They hunted, fished and made flint tools. Neanderthals and modern humans lived here, roaming the landscape before Wayland's Smithy existed.

Middle Stone Age

Mesolithic

10,000–4000 BC

After the Ice Age, people hunted animals, fished and gathered wild plants. They moved with the seasons, travelling along the Ridgeway and across the hills where Wayland's Smithy would later stand.

New Stone Age

Neolithic

4000 BC–2400 BC

Farming began in Britain. People grew crops, kept animals and cleared forests. Communities built large monuments such as long barrows and stone circles. Wayland's Smithy was built during this time.



Wayland's Smithy 1

Around 3590 BC

A wooden and stone burial chamber was built. Fourteen people were buried there over a short time. Some had arrow wounds, showing life could be dangerous. The mound was carefully marked and later covered.

Wayland's Smithy 2

Around 3460 BC

A larger barrow was built over the first, with a striking stone façade. It was used for burials for less than 100 years. Even after this, the mound remained an important and remembered place.

Bronze Age

2400 BC–800 BC

Bronze tools and weapons replaced stone. Burial customs changed from long barrows like Wayland's Smithy to individual graves in round barrows. Fields, settlements and new boundaries reshaped the countryside.

Iron Age

800 BC–43 BC

People began making tools and weapons from iron. Hillforts were built along the Ridgeway near Wayland's Smithy. Fields and settlements expanded, reshaping the land around the ancient monument.

Roman

AD 43–AD 410

The Romans invaded and settled in Britain. Roads and villas were built nearby, and the surrounding land was farmed. Ancient monuments like Wayland's Smithy stood as landmarks in a changing landscape.

Early Medieval (Anglo-Saxon)

AD 410–1066

Stories about Wayland the Smith, a magical metalworker, were told. The ancient mound inspired stories of his forge. The name "Weland's Smithy" appears in a charter from AD 955.

Medieval

1066–1540

Villagers farmed the land around Wayland's Smithy. The mound may have been used for grazing or as a marker. Stories of Wayland the Smith continued, mixing history and myth.

Post Medieval

1540–1900

Antiquarians such as John Aubrey studied the barrow. Damage from early digging led to protection. Wayland's Smithy became recognised as an important historical site.

20th century

Excavations and radiocarbon dating revealed the monument's two phases and short use. Archaeologists rebuilt parts of the site to show its original form.

21st century

Today, Wayland's Smithy is protected and open to visitors. It remains both an ancient burial monument and a place of legend.

Wayland's Smithy Tour

Follow this short trail to explore Wayland's Smithy and discover the history of this ancient Neolithic long barrow.

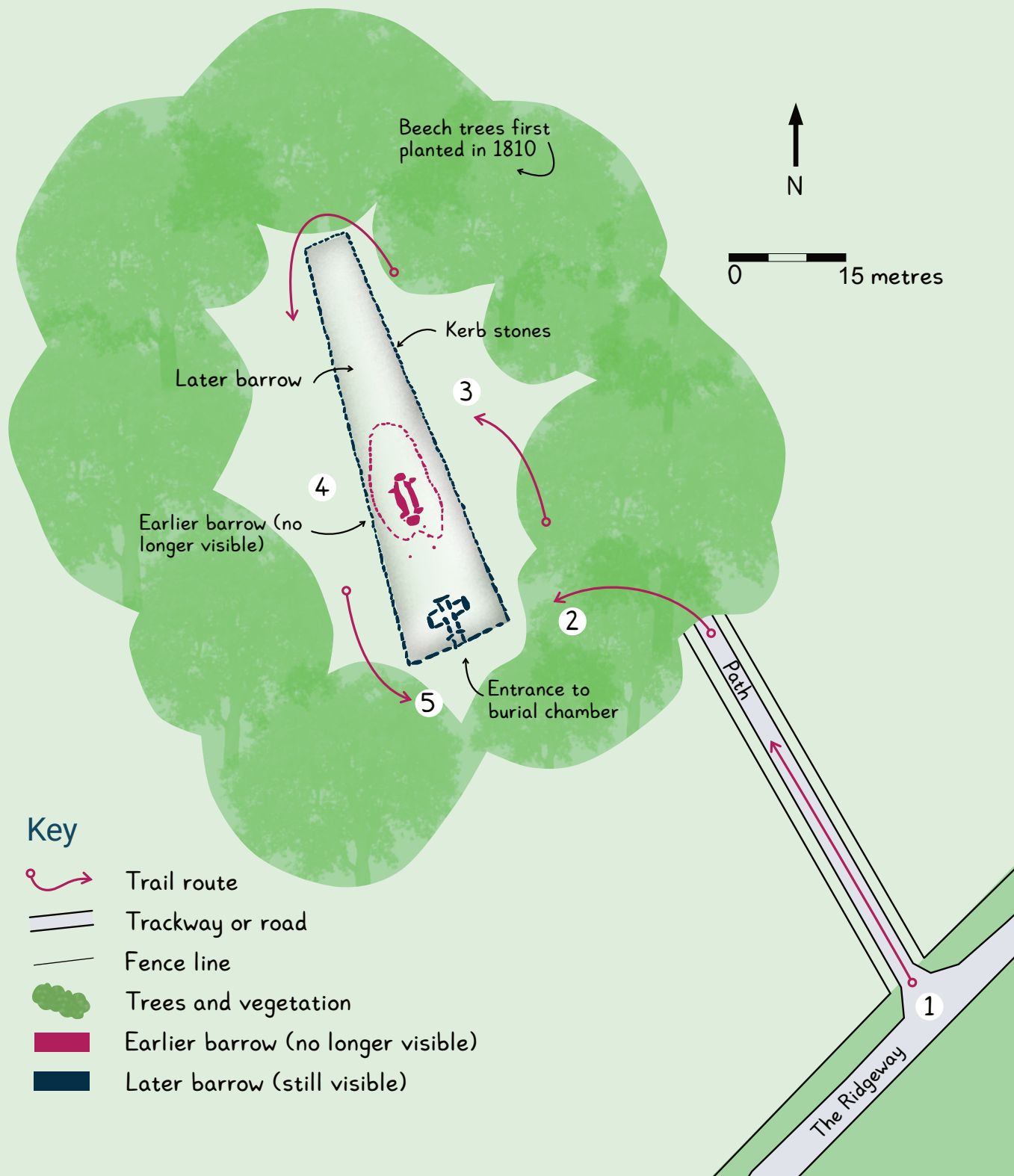
⚠ Important Information

Wayland's Smithy is a Scheduled Ancient Monument protected by law.

- Do not climb, dig or leave graffiti.
- Metal detecting is not allowed.
- Damaging the monument is a criminal offence.

Please supervise children carefully. The ground is uneven.

Map based on Ordnance Survey plan SU2885-SU2985, 1974.



1. You are standing on the Ridgeway, one of Britain's oldest paths. People have travelled along this route for thousands of years.

Wayland's Smithy, the burial chamber you see today, was built in the Neolithic period, around 5,400 years ago (about 3460-3400 BC). At that time there were fewer trees. The bright white chalk of a newly built mound would have stood out clearly across the hills.

2. Stand where you can see the whole shape of the monument.

Wayland's Smithy is a long barrow, a burial mound made from chalk and earth. It is almost 55 metres long. Look carefully at the long shape of the mound, the stones around the edge (called a kerb), and the wider southern end where the burial chamber is. Everything here was built by hand. People dug chalk, moved heavy stones and shaped the mound without modern tools.

3. You are standing where there was a large ditch. Two large ditches were dug along the sides of the mound. The chalk taken from these ditches was used to build the barrow.

Today the ditches are no longer visible because they have filled in over time. Archaeologists discovered how deep and wide they once were during excavations.

Walk around the end of the mound and notice how large the monument really is.

4. The First Barrow

Beneath this mound was an earlier burial monument built around 3590-3555 BC.

It contained a wooden and stone burial chamber. Archaeologists found the remains of 14 people buried there over a short time, possibly less than 15 years.

Some skeletons had arrow wounds, reminding us that life in the Neolithic could be dangerous.

After this short period, the first burial mound was covered.

Why might a community only use a burial place for such a short time?



Illustrations of finds from Wayland's Smithy. Above: human bones. Right: leaf shaped arrow head.

Broken tip



5. The Second Barrow

Stand at the front of the mound and look at the large stones forming the entrance.

The second larger barrow was built over the top of the first one, around 3460-3400 BC.

This monument had a striking stone entrance, or façade. The stones you see today were carefully rebuilt in 1965 after archaeological excavation.

The second barrow was used for burials for less than 100 years.

Why do you think people rebuilt the monument here instead of choosing a new place?



6. Step back and look at the whole mound.

This monument was already ancient when Bronze Age round barrows were built nearby, Iron Age hillforts appeared along the Ridgeway and the Romans came to Britain

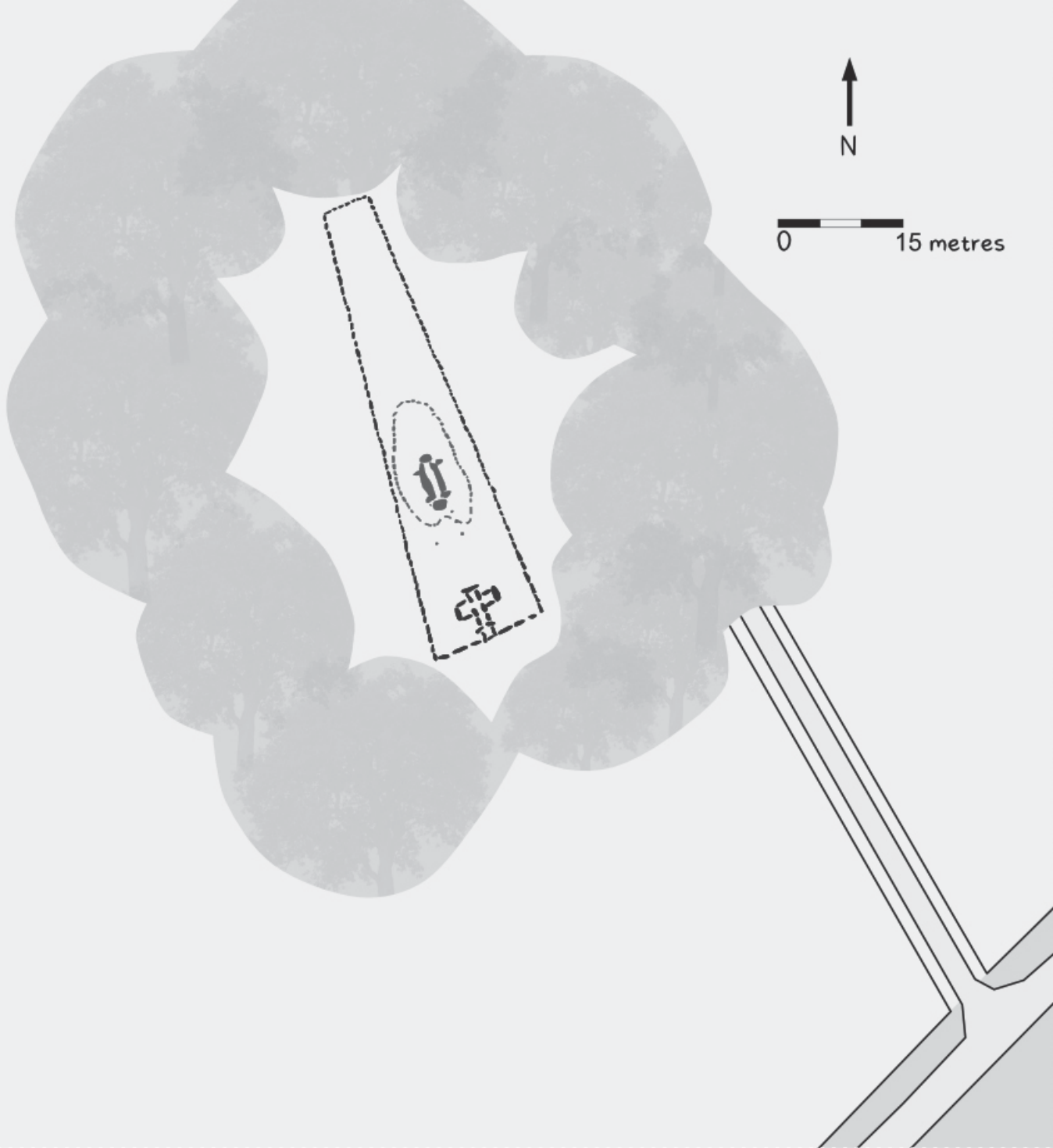
More than 4,000 years after it was built, people in Anglo-Saxon times began telling stories about a magical blacksmith named Wayland. According to legend, if a traveller left their horse and a silver coin at the mound overnight, the invisible smith Wayland would repair the horse's shoes by morning.

Because of this story, the mound became known as "Weland's Smithy." The name appears in a written land document from AD 955.

Stand quietly for a moment. What can you hear? What sounds might have been the same over 5,000 years ago? What sounds would be different?

Wayland's Smithy is both a real Neolithic burial monument and a place of legend and memory. It has stood here through thousands of years of history





Plan Your Own Tour of Wayland's Smithy

Use the map to plan your own tour of Wayland's Smithy.

Choose 3-5 stopping points around the site.

Number the stops on the map.

At each stop, write what you would show visitors.

- Think about what might interest people, such as:
- The burial mound
- The stone entrance
- The surrounding landscape
- The Ridgeway path
- The historic graffiti on the trees
- Plants, wildlife, or views

At each stop ask yourself:

What would you tell visitors about this place? Why is it interesting?

Ancient Landscape Detectives



Wayland's Smithy was built over 5,000 years ago in the Neolithic period. The landscape has changed many times since then. Look closely around you. What can you see? You can write or draw your answers.

1. Find Natural Features

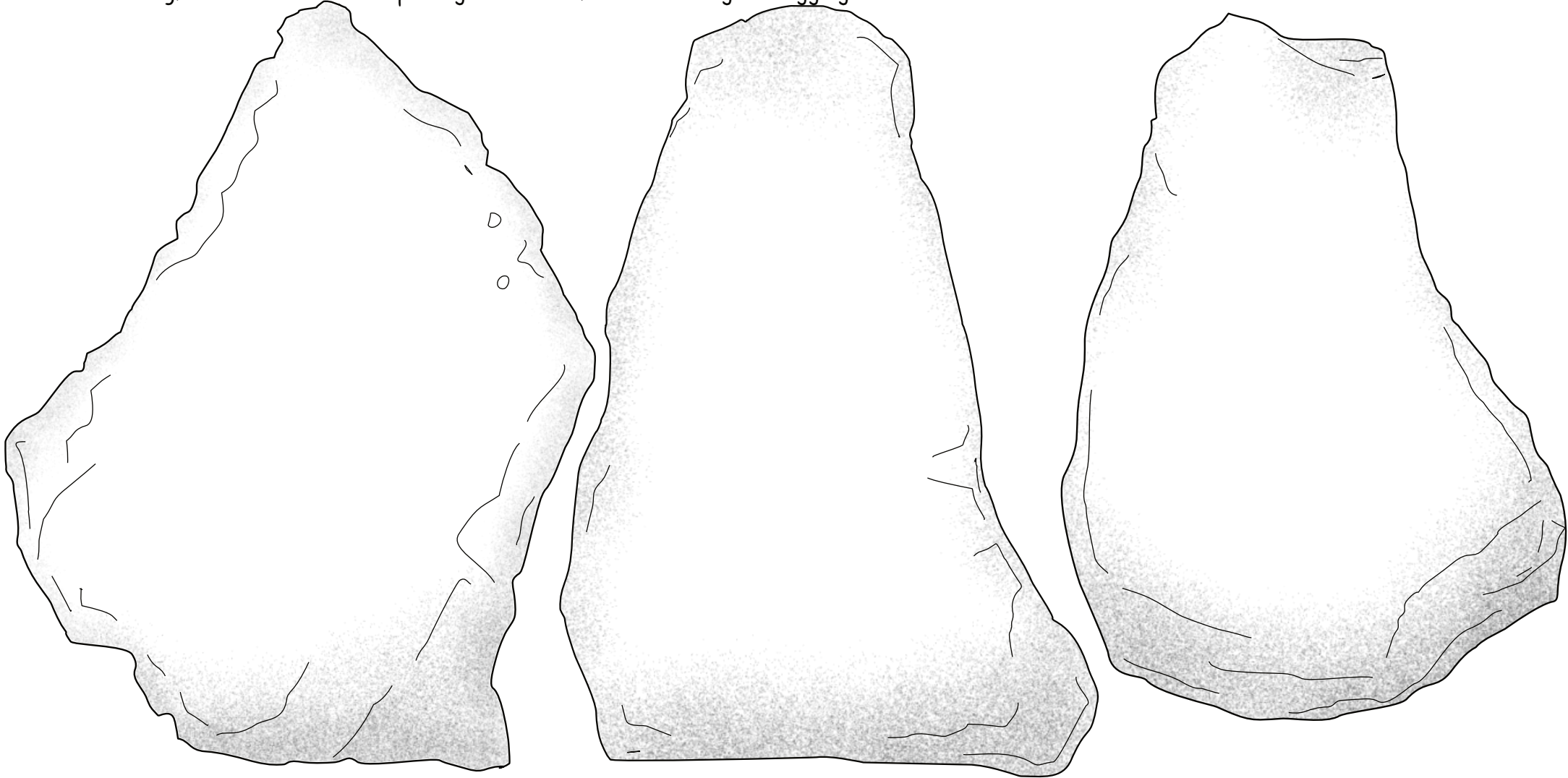
Can you spot things that might be the same as they were when Wayland's Smithy was built? For example: hills, clouds, soil.

2. Find Signs of Human-Made Change

Look again and find things that show how the landscape has changed because of people. For example: fences, planted trees, information signs.

If the Stones Could Speak

The stones at Wayland's Smithy have stood for over 5,000 years. Imagine all the things they have seen. In each stone, draw or write a different moment from the past. Perhaps the stones saw Neolithic people building the tomb, Roman farmers working nearby, Victorian visitors exploring the mound, or archaeologists digging in the 1960s. What stories would the stones tell?



Spotting Guide



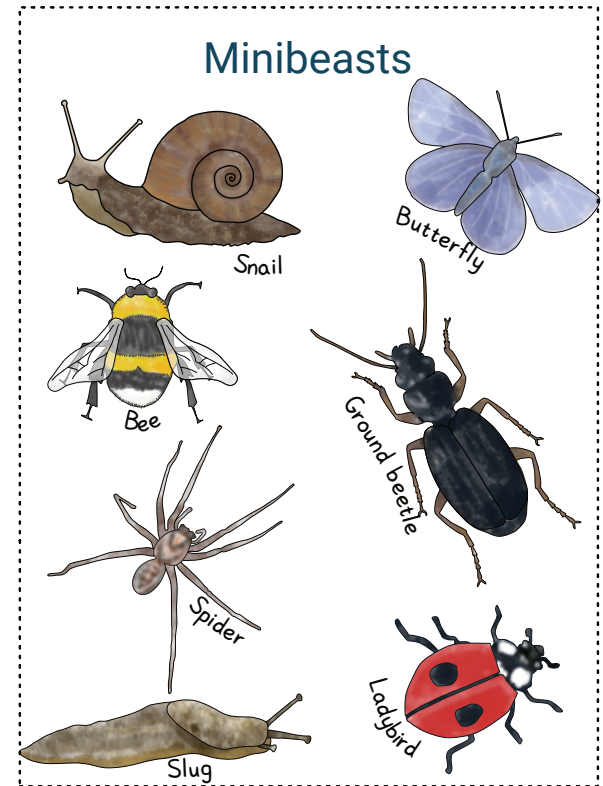
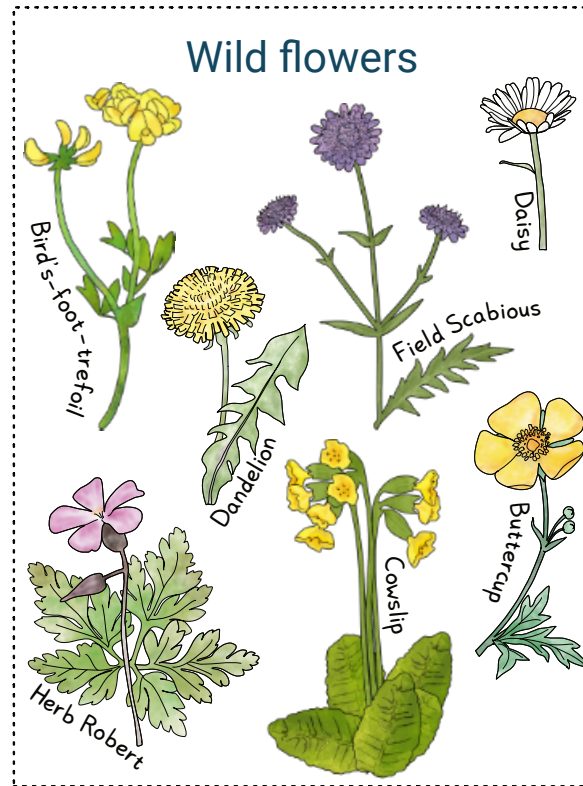
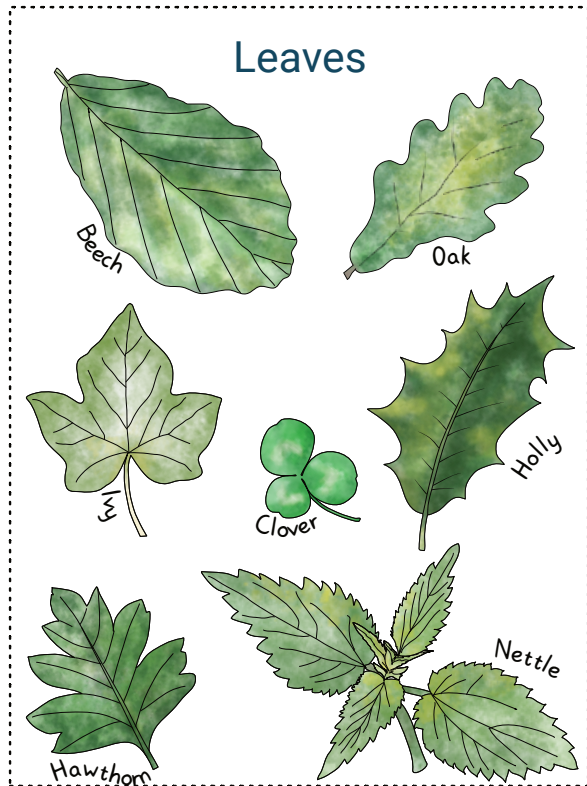
Look around you. What wildlife can you spot? Wildlife appears at different times of the day and in different seasons. You may need to visit at different times of year to see everything.

Colours and Textures



Nature comes in lots of colours and different textures. Can you find natural things that are:

- soft
- spiky
- spongy
- rough
- bumpy
- crunchy
- red
- orange
- yellow
- green
- blue



How Do We Know About the Past?

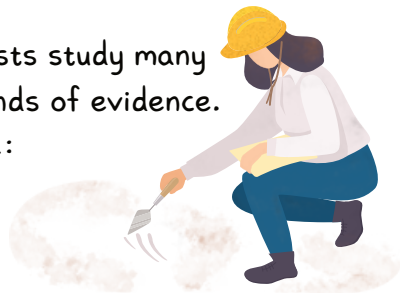
Much of human history was never written down. For thousands of years people left no written records. So how do we know what life was like long ago?

We learn about the past through archaeology. Archaeology is the study of the past through the traces people left behind. These traces might include objects, buildings, bones, or marks in the soil.

By studying these clues, archaeologists can begin to understand how people lived thousands of years ago.

What Clues Do Archaeologists Use?

Archaeologists study many different kinds of evidence. For example:



Artefacts: objects made or used by people, such as tools, pottery or jewellery. These show how people lived and what they valued.



Buildings and monuments: structures such as houses, tombs and monuments can tell us how people built, organised their communities and remembered the dead.



Human bones: skeletons can reveal information about a person's age, health, diet and injuries.



Animal bones and plant remains: these help archaeologists understand what people ate and what the environment was like.



Pollen and seeds: tiny plant remains preserved in soil can show what the landscape looked like thousands of years ago.

How Do Archaeologists Investigate Sites?



Archaeologists use different methods to investigate the past. Often they begin by studying a site without digging. This helps them understand what might be buried underground. These methods include:

Aerial photography, which can reveal buried features when seen from above

Geophysical surveys, which use scientific equipment to detect structures hidden beneath the ground

If archaeologists decide to investigate further, they may carry out an **excavation**. During an excavation, archaeologists carefully remove layers of soil to reveal artefacts, buildings and other evidence from the past.

Scientists can also use techniques such as radiocarbon dating to discover how old objects and bones are.

Archaeology at Wayland's Smithy

Wayland's Smithy has been studied by archaeologists and historians for hundreds of years. The monument was first recorded around 1670 by the antiquarian John Aubrey, who made one of the earliest drawings of the site. Later historians also described the monument in the 1700s and 1800s.

The first archaeological excavations took place in 1919–1920. These investigations confirmed that the monument contained a stone burial chamber and that human remains had been buried inside. However, the work was not carefully recorded.

A much larger excavation took place in 1962–1963, led by archaeologists Stuart Piggott and Richard Atkinson. Using modern methods, they carefully excavated the mound and studied the stones, soil layers and human remains.

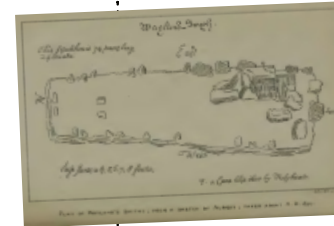
Their work showed that the monument had been built in two stages during the Neolithic period. The archaeologists also discovered the remains of 14 people buried in the earlier monument. After the excavation, parts of the monument were restored in 1965 so visitors could better understand how it once looked.

These investigations helped archaeologists understand how Wayland's Smithy was built, used as a burial place, and why it remained an important landmark for thousands of years.

This Monument Has Been Studied for Hundreds of Years



1670
John Aubrey makes one of the first drawings of the monument.



1700s–1800s
Historians and antiquarians study and describe the site.

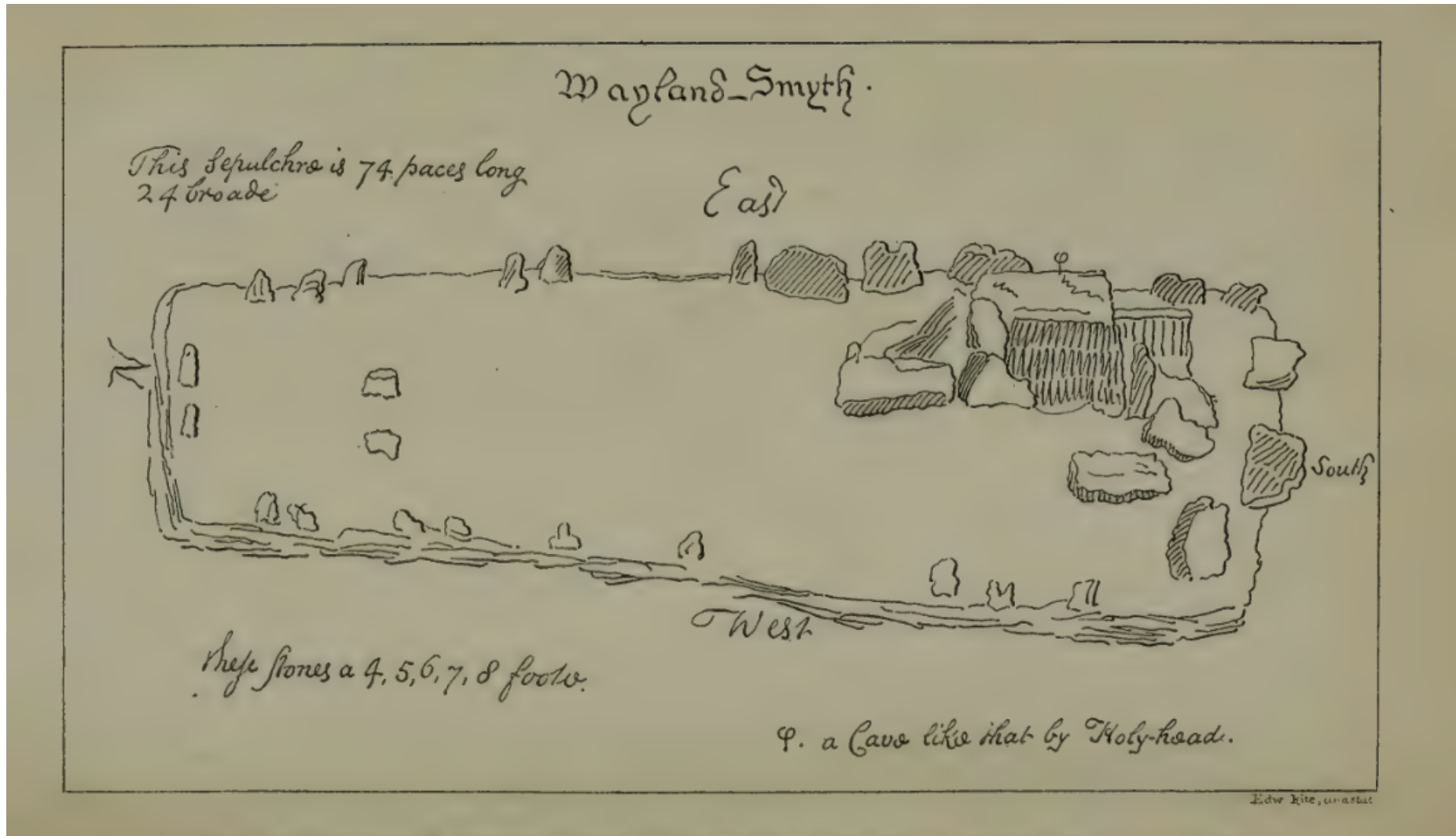


1919–1920
The first excavations confirm that the monument contains a burial chamber.

1962–1963
Major archaeological excavations reveal the monument was built in two stages.

Top to bottom: Portrait of John Aubrey (Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 2.0); Aubrey sketch of Wayland's Smithy in 1670; sketch of excavation at Wayland's Smithy 1962–63.

Aubrey's Sketch of Wayland's Smithy in About 1670



Plan of Wayland's Smithy by John Aubrey in about 1670. Image credit: The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine, 1862.

Neolithic Life

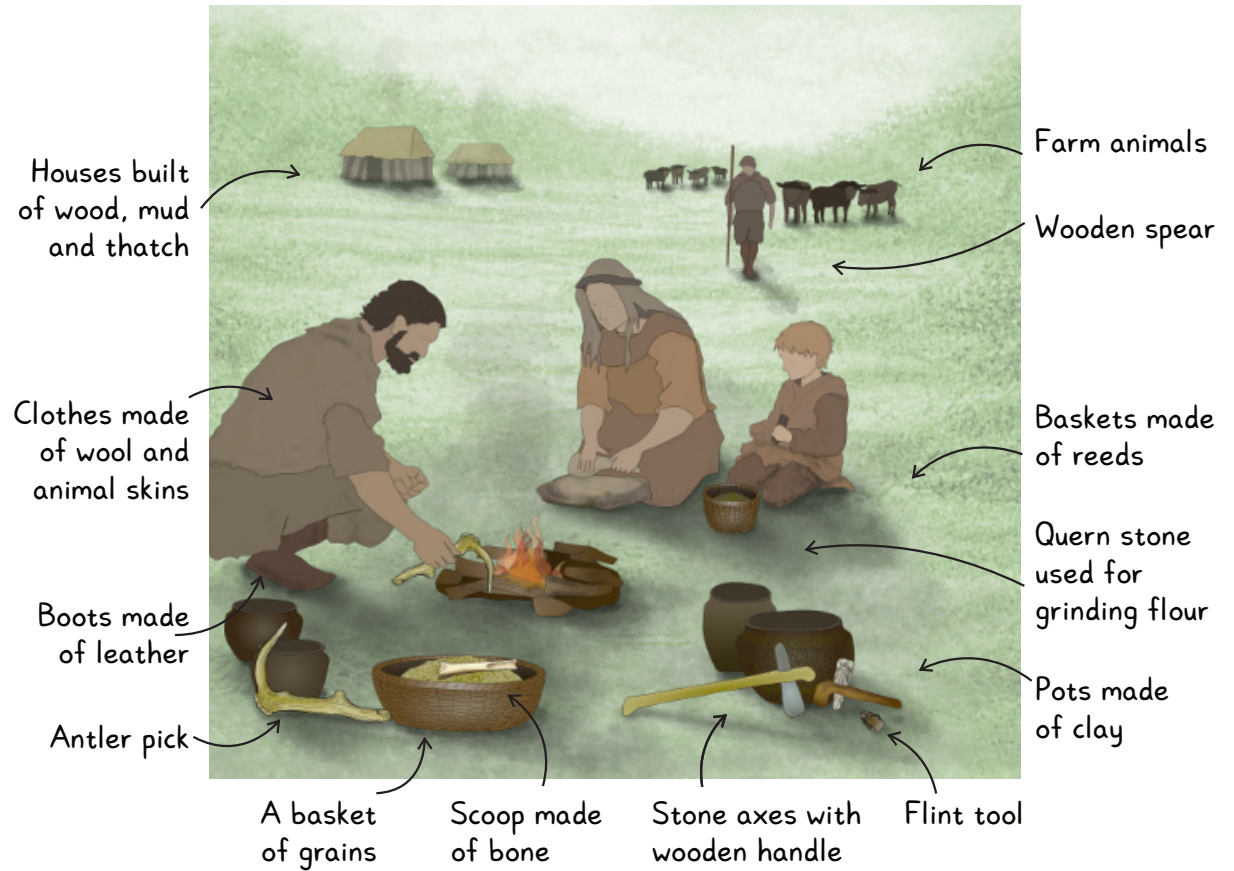
In Neolithic times, people lived in small farming communities. In this scene, a family grinds wheat and works with tools while others look after livestock nearby. Some things in this picture, like bones, pottery and stone tools, can survive in the ground for thousands of years, while things made of wood, plants or leather usually rot away.



Neolithic Life – What Would Survive?

Here is a scene showing what life might have looked like in the Neolithic. People at this time only had natural materials to make everything they needed, things like stone, wood, bone, antler, leather, clay, plant fibres, and animal skins. They did not have metal, glass, or plastic.

If archaeologists dug up the remains of this settlement, what objects do you think they would find? What objects would have decayed?






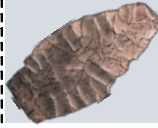


Archaeological Finds

These cards show a selection of artefacts uncovered during excavations at Wayland's Smithy.

Look at the scale bar under each picture to see the real size. Some objects are tiny, like snail shells only a few millimetres across, while others are much bigger, such as the sarsen saddle quern, which is about 30 cm across.

Cut along the dashed lines and fold along the dotted lines to make the artefact cards.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Pottery</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;">Pottery</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;">Arrowhead</p>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Piece of Pottery Early Neolithic</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;">Piece of Pottery Early Neolithic</p>  | <p style="text-align: center;">Arrowhead Early Neolithic</p>  |
| <p>This small piece of pottery comes from a pot made during the Early Neolithic. Pots like this were shaped by hand and were probably fired in shallow pits on which a bonfire was built. It was found on the old ground surface beneath the earliest barrow, which tells us the pot was here before the mound was built.</p> | <p>This is part of the rim of a clay pot. The curved edge shows where the top of the pot would have been. Finding a rim helps archaeologists work out the full size and shape of the vessel. Pots like this were used for everyday tasks such as holding water, food, or grain. This example was made in the Early Neolithic and was found on the old land surface beneath the earliest burial mound.</p> | <p>This is a leaf-shaped arrowhead. It would have been fixed to a wooden shaft to make an arrow. Early Neolithic people used arrows for hunting, but they could also have been used in fights or to defend their community. Three arrowheads of this type were found at Wayland's Smithy. On this one, the tip has broken off, suggesting it snapped when it struck something.</p> |

Fold

Cut

Antler Pick



Antler Pick

Early Neolithic



This tool is made from deer antler. Several antler pieces found at Wayland's Smithy had worn tines, the pointed tips, showing they had been used. Antler picks were common digging tools in the Early Neolithic. Antler is tough and slightly flexible, making it useful for loosening and breaking up soil.

Flint Flake



Flint Flake

Early Neolithic



This flint flake has a sloping, sharpened edge called a bevel. It was probably made for simple cutting or scraping jobs. Tools like this show that Neolithic people were skilled at shaping flint for everyday tasks. This example was made quickly from local flint and was likely used for a short time before being thrown away.

Flint Flake



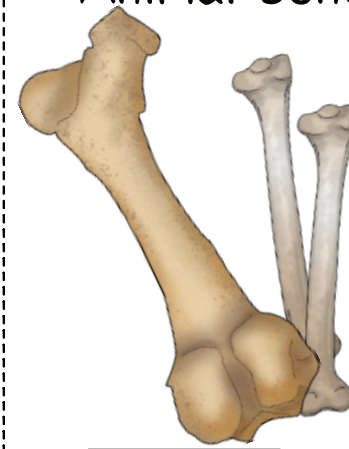
Flint Flake

Early Neolithic



This flake is one of many simple flint tools found beneath the barrow at Wayland's Smithy. People made tools like this by striking local flint to create sharp edges for everyday tasks. Most were made quickly and then thrown away, showing that people were making and using flint tools on the old ground surface before the tomb was built.

Animal bones



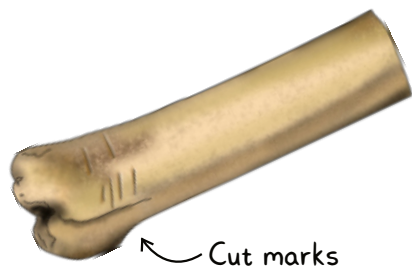
Animal bones

Early Neolithic



Animal bones found at Wayland's Smithy show that many different animals lived nearby or were used by people. Most of the bones came from cattle, including both farm cows and at least one huge wild aurochs. There were also bones from pigs, sheep, and several kinds of deer. A few bones came from animals like dogs, a fox, small mammals and birds.

Bone with Cut Marks



Bone with Cut Marks
Early Neolithic

This bone comes from a cow and has small cut marks on its surface. These marks were made by sharp flint tools when people were butchering the animal. Bones like this help archaeologists understand how animals were prepared for food in the Early Neolithic, and they show that people were eating cattle in the area.

Broken Stone Axe



Broken Stone Axe
Early Neolithic

This axe was carefully shaped and polished to make a strong, smooth blade. It is made from greenstone that probably came from Cornwall, showing that materials were travelling long distances in the Neolithic. Although it is broken now, it would once have been fixed into a wooden handle and used for chopping wood or clearing plants.

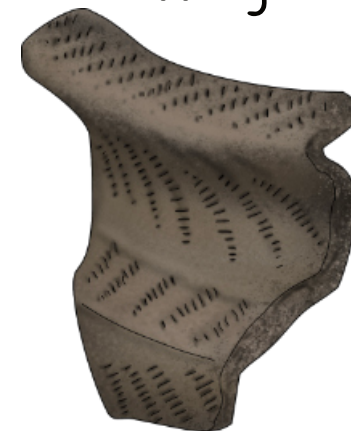
Broken Flint Axe



Broken Flint Axe
Early Neolithic

This flint axe head was shaped to make a strong cutting tool. Although it is broken now, it would once have been fixed into a wooden handle and used for jobs such as chopping wood or clearing plants. Flint axes were important everyday tools in the Early Neolithic, and even broken pieces help archaeologists understand how they were made and used.

Pottery



Pottery
Middle Neolithic

This pottery sherd comes from a Peterborough-style pot. These pots often had decorative patterns made by pressing twisted cord or tools into the clay. This piece of pottery is dated to the Middle Neolithic. Only one piece of this type of pottery was found at Wayland's Smithy.

Quern Stone



Quern Stone
Early Neolithic

This quern stone was used for grinding grain into flour. It has a shallow, saddle-shaped hollow where grain was placed, and a smaller stone was pushed back and forth across it. Several quern stones were found at Wayland's Smithy. Some had been used so much that both sides were worn smooth. One was reused as a building stone during the construction of the tomb.

Snail Shells



Snail Shells
Neolithic

Snail shells found in the soil help archaeologists learn what the environment was like in the past. Different snails live in grassland, scrub, woodland, or dark, damp places. At Wayland's Smithy they show that the land was mostly open grassland, and cellar snails inside the chamber reveal that some snails lived in the dark spaces of the tomb itself.

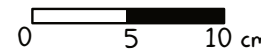
Pottery



Pottery
Iron Age

This is a fragment of Iron Age pottery. Pieces like this were found in the ditches and soil around Wayland's Smithy. A few had simple incised patterns, such as bands and triangles. These finds show that long after the Neolithic tomb was built, the area had become part of a busy farming landscape used by Iron Age communities.

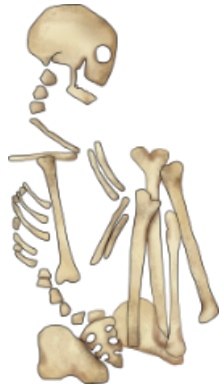
Pottery



Pottery
Roman

This is a piece of Roman pottery. Around seventy pieces of Roman pottery were found in the ditches and soil around Wayland's Smithy, including a few sherds of fine red Samian ware. These finds show that the area was still being used in Roman times, when the old Neolithic mound had become part of a farmed landscape with field ditches and tracks.

Human Bones



0 100 cm



Human Bones Early Neolithic

At least fourteen people were buried in the first tomb at Wayland's Smithy. They included men, women and one child, and most were young adults. Their bones show signs of everyday health problems such as tooth decay and sore joints. Later, more people were buried in the second, larger tomb, but it was dug into long ago so archaeologists know less about them.

Arrowhead in Bone



0 5 cm

Arrowhead in Bone Neolithic



This is a bit of a human hip bone with the tip of a flint arrowhead still lodged in it. This shows the person was shot and killed by an arrow. Archaeologists found three flint arrowheads among the bones at Wayland's Smithy. The other two were found nearby, suggesting that more people may also have been wounded by arrows.

Bone Scoop



0 10 cm

Bone Scoop Early Neolithic



This tool was made from the leg bone of a sheep. The end of the bone was shaped into a simple scoop, and the worn surface shows it was used many times. It is an example of how Neolithic people reused animal bones to make small, useful tools.

WAYLAND'S SMITHY EXCAVATION

Specialist Report: FINDS ANALYSIS

Site: Wayland's Smithy

Location: Oxfordshire

Specialist: Archaeological Finds Specialist

Investigation: Post-Excavation Artefact Study

EVIDENCE

EVIDENCE EXAMINED

During the excavation of Wayland's Smithy, archaeologists discovered many objects buried in the soil. These objects are called artefacts.

A finds specialist examined the artefacts recovered from the monument and surrounding soil layers. By studying these objects, archaeologists can learn how people lived, worked and used the site between about 3,600 and 3,400 BC.

The artefacts examined in this report include tools made from flint and stone, fragments of pottery, grinding stones, and objects made from bone and antler.

RESULTS

The finds specialist identified several important types of artefacts from the site.

Flint tools and flakes



Many pieces of flint were discovered. Most were simple flakes used for everyday tasks. Some pieces were shaped into tools such as scrapers, knives and serrated flakes. Three finely made leaf-shaped arrowheads were also found inside the burial area.

Broken axes

Fragments of both flint and stone axes were found. Some of these appear to come from high-quality axes that had been deliberately broken.



Pottery

More than 100 fragments of pottery were recovered. Most belong to the Early Neolithic period, when the monument was first built. Some fragments come from later periods, including Iron Age and Roman pottery, showing that people returned to the site long after it was built.



Quern stones

Several large quern stones made from sarsen stone were discovered. These stones were used for grinding grain into flour, and some were worn smooth from long use.



Bone and antler tools

Red deer antlers with worn tips were found. These were probably used as digging tools. One sheep bone had been shaped into a small tool, possibly used for scraping.



WHAT THIS TELLS US

The artefacts suggest that the people connected to Wayland's Smithy were part of a Neolithic farming community.

They made tools from flint, hunted animals, prepared food and ground grain into flour. Some artefacts, such as deliberately broken axes, suggest that the monument may also have been used for special ceremonies or rituals.

The presence of later pottery shows that the site continued to be visited by people for many centuries after it was first built.

WAYLAND'S SMITHY EXCAVATION

Specialist Report: HUMAN BONES

Site: Wayland's Smithy

Location: Oxfordshire

Specialist: Human Bone Specialist (Osteoarchaeologist)

Investigation: Post-Excavation Study of Human Remains

EVIDENCE

EVIDENCE EXAMINED

During the excavation of Wayland's Smithy, archaeologists discovered human skeletons inside the burial chambers. These bones were carefully studied by a specialist called an osteoarchaeologist, who examines human remains to learn about people who lived in the past.

By studying the bones, archaeologists can find out about a person's age, sex, height, health and injuries.

RESULTS

The specialist discovered several important pieces of information.

- The remains of 14 people were found in the earliest tomb.
- The group included 11 males, 2 females and one child.
- Most individuals were young adults under about 35 years old.
- Adult men were around 165-175 cm tall.
- Some people showed signs of tooth decay and gum disease.
- Some bones showed signs of joint wear similar to arthritis,



which may have been caused by hard physical work.

- One individual had a broken arm that had healed, showing that they survived the injury.
- Three flint arrowheads were found among the bones, including one lodged in a hip bone.
- The hip bone shows no signs of healing, suggesting the arrow wound may have caused the person's death.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

The evidence suggests that the people buried at Wayland's Smithy were members of a Neolithic farming community living. Their bones show signs of everyday life, including hard physical work, illness, and injury.

The presence of arrowheads among the skeletons suggests that violence may have occurred, and that some individuals may have died from arrow wounds.

The careful placement of the bodies inside the burial chamber shows that these people were intentionally buried by their community, suggesting the tomb was an important place for remembering the dead.

WAYLAND'S SMITHY EXCAVATION

Specialist Report: ANIMAL BONES

Site: Wayland's Smithy

Location: Oxfordshire

Specialist: Animal Bone Specialist (Zooarchaeologist)

Investigation: Post-Excavation Study of Animal Remains

EVIDENCE

EVIDENCE EXAMINED

Animal bones discovered during the excavation were studied by a zooarchaeologist. By identifying the species of animals and examining marks on the bones, specialists can learn about the animals that lived in the area and how people used them for food, tools, and farming activities.

RESULTS

The zooarchaeological study identified bones from a range of domestic and wild animals.

- Bones from cattle were found, including both farm cows and a large wild aurochs (an ancestor of modern cattle).
- Pig bones were discovered, including bones from young pigs. One tooth may belong to a wild boar.
- Sheep bones were also present, including animals of different ages.
- Bones from red deer and roe deer were identified.



- Some deer antlers had worn tips, suggesting they were used as tools, possibly for digging.
- One sheep bone had been shaped into a small tool.
- A small number of bones came from other animals including dogs, a horse, a fox, and a pine marten.
- Bones from small mammals such as mice, voles, and a mole, as well as bird bones, were also found.
- Bones came from animals of different ages, from young animals to adults.
- Some bones had cut marks, showing that animals were butchered and prepared for food.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

The animal bones show that people connected to Wayland's Smithy kept domestic animals such as cattle, sheep and pigs, which were important for food and farming.

They also hunted wild animals such as deer, which provided meat, antlers, and other useful materials. Deer antlers were sometimes used as tools for digging or working the soil.

Some of the smaller animals found may have lived in the surrounding landscape or may have burrowed into the mound long after the tomb was built, showing how the monument became part of the natural environment over time.

WAYLAND'S SMITHY EXCAVATION

Specialist Report: ENVIRONMENTAL (SNAILS)

Site: Wayland's Smithy

Location: Oxfordshire

Specialist: Environmental Archaeologist (Mollusca Specialist)

Investigation: Study of Snail Shells from Soil Samples

EVIDENCE

EVIDENCE EXAMINED

During excavation, archaeologists collected soil samples from different parts of Wayland's Smithy, including the burial deposits, the surrounding ditches, and the buried ground surface beneath the mound. These samples were studied by an environmental archaeologist, a scientist who studies natural remains to understand ancient landscapes.

Snail shells can survive in the soil for thousands of years.

Different types of snails live in different environments, such as woodland, scrub, or open grassland. By identifying the types of snail shells found in each soil layer, archaeologists can work out what the landscape looked like when the monument was built.

RESULTS

The snail shells found at Wayland's Smithy included species that prefer woodland, scrub, and open grassland environments.

Some snails found in the burial deposits included the cellar snail, a species that lives in dark, damp places and may have lived inside the burial chamber.



- Snail shells from the surrounding ditches and buried soil show a mixture of grassland and woodland species, suggesting the area had open ground with some bushes and small trees.
- The earliest layers show open grassland and scrub, although there is evidence that trees and bushes grew back for a short time.
- In later layers, grassland snails become more common again, showing that the land became open once more.



WHAT THIS TELLS US

The snail evidence shows that the landscape around Wayland's Smithy was already quite open when the monument was built, rather than being covered in thick forest. This suggests that Neolithic people had already begun clearing woodland and managing the land for farming and grazing animals.

Although trees and bushes briefly returned in some areas, the evidence shows that the landscape remained mostly open for a long time after the monument was built and used. This suggests that people continued to manage the surrounding land.

The open landscape may also have made the monument easy to see from across the surrounding countryside, meaning it could have acted as an important landmark for the local community.

WAYLAND'S SMITHY EXCAVATION

Specialist Report: DATING EVIDENCE

Site: Wayland's Smithy

Location: Oxfordshire

Specialist: Archaeological Scientist (Radiocarbon Dating)

Investigation: Radiocarbon Dating the Monument

EVIDENCE

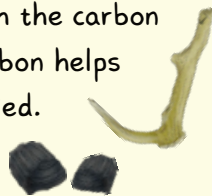
EVIDENCE EXAMINED

Archaeologists use two main methods to work out the age of ancient sites: relative dating and absolute dating.

Relative dating compares a site with other discoveries.

Archaeologists look at the shape and style of monuments, the layers of soil uncovered during excavation, and the artefacts found at the site. By comparing these clues with other known sites, they can estimate when a monument was built.

To find a more exact date, archaeologists use absolute dating methods. At Wayland's Smithy, scientists used radiocarbon dating, which measures the amount of radioactive carbon left in organic materials such as bone, antler, or charcoal. Living things absorb carbon while alive, but after death the carbon slowly breaks down. Measuring the remaining carbon helps scientists estimate how long ago the organism died.



RESULTS

Scientists carried out radiocarbon dating on human bones and other organic remains from the monument. In total, more than twenty radiocarbon dates were obtained.

The results show that:

- The first burials in the wooden mortuary structure began around 3590–3555 BC (about 5,600 years ago).
- The burial structure was used for a short period of time, probably about 15 years, within a single generation.
- The structure was then covered by a mound, creating the first long barrow.
- The larger stone chambered tomb (Wayland's Smithy II) was built later, between about 3460 and 3400 BC.



WHAT THIS TELLS US

Radiocarbon dating shows that Wayland's Smithy was built and used by Neolithic farming communities more than 5,000 years ago.

The earliest monument was a wooden burial structure built around 3590–3555 BC, used for burials over a short period of time. Around 3520–3470 BC, it was covered by a mound to create the first barrow.

Later, between about 3460 and 3400 BC, the monument was rebuilt and enlarged, creating the stone chambered tomb seen today.

This shows that Wayland's Smithy remained an important place for the community for many years, as people returned to rebuild the monument and honour their ancestors. It was built during a time when communities across Britain were constructing large burial monuments and shaping the landscape.

Evidence Recording Sheet

Use the specialist reports to find evidence about the people of Wayland's Smithy.

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| <p>What food did they eat?</p> | <p>What was the landscape like around them?</p> | <p>What animals lived nearby?</p> |
| <p>How healthy were the people?</p> | <p>How long ago did they live?</p> | <p>What activities do you think people did here? What evidence suggests this?</p> |

Evidence Recording Sheet: Example Answers

Use the specialist reports to find evidence about the people of Wayland's Smithy.

What food did they eat?

People ate meat from cattle, sheep and pigs that they farmed. Archaeologists know this because animal bones with cut marks were found at the site, showing the animals were butchered and eaten. A quern stone was also found, which was used to grind grain into flour, suggesting people were also eating foods made from crops such as wheat or barley.

What was the landscape like around them?

The area was mostly open grassland with some bushes and small trees.

The woodland had already been cleared by Neolithic farmers, probably for grazing animals and farming. Snail shells found in the soil show that the landscape was mostly open rather than dense forest.

What animals lived nearby?

Animals included cattle, sheep, pigs, red deer and roe deer. Other animals living in the area included dogs, foxes, pine martens, birds and small mammals such as mice and voles.

Some animals were farmed by people, while others were wild animals living in the surrounding landscape.

How healthy were the people?

The bones show that people sometimes had tooth decay and gum disease, and some had joint wear like arthritis, probably from hard physical work.

One person had a broken arm that had healed, which shows they survived the injury. Some skeletons were found with flint arrowheads, suggesting that a few people may have died from arrow wounds.

How long ago did they live?

The people lived during the Neolithic period, more than 5,000 years ago.

Radiocarbon dating shows the first burials happened around 3590 to 3555 BC. Later, a larger stone tomb was built between about 3460 and 3400 BC.

What activities do you think people did here? What evidence suggests this?

People probably farmed animals, hunted deer, and worked the land. A quern stone used for grinding grain shows that people were preparing food from crops. Deer antlers found at the site show they may have been used as tools for digging. The monument also shows that people carried out burial ceremonies and returned to the site to honour their dead.

Draw a Person from Neolithic Wayland's Smithy

Draw a Neolithic person in their environment. Your drawing might include: animals nearby, tools or activities they might be doing, the landscape around them. Use the evidence from the reports to help you decide what to include. Think like an archaeologist: they always use evidence to support their ideas!



The Legend of Wayland's Smithy

Near the ancient track known as the Ridgeway, not far from White Horse Hill and Uffington Castle, lies a mysterious stone chamber called Wayland's Smithy.

Long ago, people believed that this place was home to Wayland, a legendary master blacksmith known for his magical skill. Stories about Wayland appear across old Norse and Saxon tales, where he is described as a maker of wonderful weapons and jewellery, so talented that even kings and gods sought his work.

Travellers once said that if your horse lost a shoe on the lonely paths near the Smithy, you should lead the horse to the ancient stones at dusk. Quietly, you would place a coin on the flat stone at the entrance. Then, importantly, you had to walk away without looking back. If you broke the rule and tried to peek, the magic would fail.

According to the tale, in the stillness of night an invisible smith would emerge from the shadows. While the traveller waited out of sight, Wayland himself

would take the coin as payment and expertly shoe the horse. By morning, the traveller would return to find the horse calm, repaired, and ready for the journey ahead, the coin vanished without a trace.

This story was widely known by the 18th century and was retold by many writers, who were fascinated by the idea of a hidden craftsman helping strangers who respected the old ways.

Today, Wayland's Smithy remains a peaceful, atmospheric place, surrounded by tall trees and birdsong. Many visitors say it still feels as though someone ancient and watchful might be working just out of sight. And so the legend lives on: a mysterious smith, a secret gift of craftsmanship, and the magical reward for those who trust in the unseen.

Wayland's Smithy in 1937



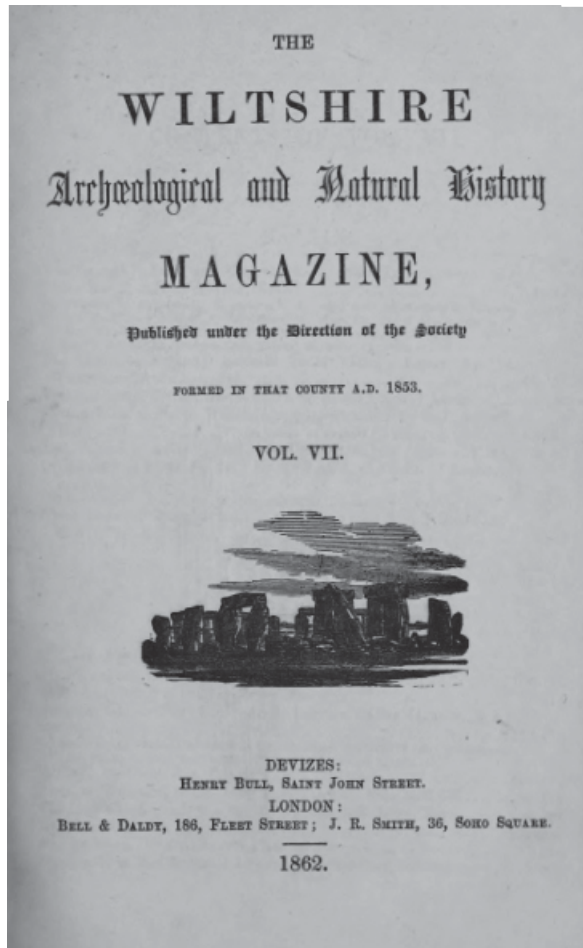
Photo credit: © Historic England Archives

Historic Map Showing Wayland Smith's Cave



Ordnance Survey Berkshire Sheet XIX
Published: 1883
Reproduced with the permission of the
National Library of Scotland.

Poem About Wayland's Smithy



If you along the Rudgeway go,
About a mile for aught I know,
There Wayland's cave then you may see
Surrounded by a group of trees.

They say that in this cave did dwell
A smith that was invisible ;
At last he was found out, they say,
He blew up the place and vlod away.¹
To Devonshire then he did go,
Full of sorrow, grief, and woe,
Never to return again ;

This poem was recorded by John Thurnam in The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine in 1862. He wrote an article about Wayland's Smithy and the stories people told about it, and recorded this poem after hearing it from local villagers.

If you along the Rudgeway go,
About a mile for aught I know,
There Wayland's cave then you may see
Surrounded by a group of trees.

They say that in this cave did dwell
A smith that was invisible:
At last he was found out, they say,
He blew up the place and vlod away.

To Devonshire then he did go,
Full of sorrow, grief and woe,
Never to return again.

Image credit: The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine, 1862

Key vocabulary

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Anglo-Saxon | People who lived in Britain from around AD 410 to 1066, after the Romans left Britain. | Environmental evidence | Environmental evidence is information from the natural world, like soil, plants, or animal remains, that helps us understand how people lived in the past. |
| Archaeologist | A person who studies the past by investigating sites, artefacts and environmental evidence. | Excavation | The careful process of digging and recording archaeological remains to uncover evidence of people in the past. |
| Archaeology | The study of people in the past through excavation and the careful study of artefacts, structures and other physical remains. | Flint tools | A tool made from flint, a hard stone that can be shaped into sharp edges. Flint tools were widely used in the Neolithic period. |
| Archaeological finds | Objects, structures, or remains discovered during archaeological excavations that provide insights into past human societies and cultures | Folklore | Stories, beliefs and traditions that are shared within a culture and passed from generation to generation |
| Artefact | An object made or used by people. | Historic environment | The physical remains that survive in the landscape today that were created by people in the past. |
| Blacksmith | A craftsperson who makes objects from iron or steel, such as tools, weapons or horseshoes. | Interpretation | An explanation of what something means, based on evidence. |
| Burial chamber | A stone-built space inside a tomb where bodies were placed. | Legend | A traditional story passed down over time that may not be historically accurate. |
| Century | A period of one hundred years. | Long barrow | A long mound of earth and stone built as a burial place during the Neolithic period. |
| Chronology | The arrangement of events in order of how long ago they happened. | | |
| Decay | Organic material that rots away through the action of bacteria and fungi over time. | | |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Monument | A structure built by people that has historical, cultural or ceremonial importance. |
| Neolithic | The New Stone Age (around 4000-2400 BC in Britain), when farming began and people built monuments such as long barrows. |
| Norse | Relating to the people of Scandinavia and their myths and traditions. |
| Oral tradition | The passing down of stories, beliefs and knowledge by speaking rather than writing. |
| Prehistoric | A time before written records. We learn about this period through archaeological evidence. |
| Smithy | A workshop where a blacksmith works. |
| Stratigraphy | The study of the layers of soil or rock in the ground. The deeper underground a layer is, the older it is. |