

## The Beaker People

Around 4,500 years ago, significant waves of migration from central Europe brought a new culture to Britain. Archaeologists refer to these settlers as the Beaker People, a name derived from their most recognisable artefact — a finely crafted, bell-shaped pottery vessel. These beakers were decorated with intricate geometric designs, created by impressing twisted cord or a comb-like tool into the clay before firing. Many have been found in outstanding condition, suggesting they were highly prized possessions.

The Beaker People's arrival represents a pivotal moment in British history. They introduced the revolutionary technology of bronze-making, achieved by smelting copper and alloying it with tin. Bronze was considerably harder and more durable than stone, enabling the production of superior tools and weapons, including daggers, axes, and arrowheads. This technological shift marked the beginning of what historians call the Bronze Age in Britain.

Beyond their metalworking skills, the Beaker People were accomplished farmers. They cultivated cereal crops and raised livestock — cattle, sheep, and pigs — living in small, loosely connected settlements across the landscape.

Their burial practices reveal much about their culture and spiritual beliefs. The dead were buried individually, often in a crouched position within a stone-lined cist grave. Alongside the body were placed personal items — a beaker, weapons, tools, or ornaments — strongly implying a belief in an afterlife where these possessions would serve the deceased.

Recent DNA evidence also suggests the Beaker People had a dramatic impact on the existing population of Britain, largely replacing earlier Neolithic communities.

## Questions

1. What does the word "artefact" mean?
2. Where did the Beaker People migrate from?
3. How were the beakers decorated?
4. What does "alloying" mean?
5. Why was bronze better than stone for making tools and weapons?
6. What name do historians give to the period when bronze tools replaced stone ones?
7. Name two crops or animals the Beaker People farmed.
8. Describe how the Beaker People buried their dead.
9. What does recent DNA evidence tell us about the Beaker People's impact on Britain?
10. What can we infer about the Beaker People's values and beliefs from the objects placed in their graves?



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