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# History Foot Step notes

For 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> years  
Junior Certificate

Higher & Ordinary Level

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## WORK OF HISTORIANS/ARCHAEOLOGISTS

### *History:*

- History is the ‘Story of the Past’ – historians must gather evidence to know what happened just like detectives must gather evidence to solve a case
- Evidence for historians come from sources – Primary Sources and Secondary Sources
- A Primary Sources is evidence that comes directly from the period being studied – if studying Ancient Rome, a Roman coin would be a Primary Source
- A Secondary Sources is evidence that comes from after the period being studied but is related to it – if studying Ancient Rome, a documentary film on Gladiators would be a Secondary Source
- Sources can also be classified as **oral** (word of mouth), **written** (letters, diaries, newspapers), **pictorial** (photographs, films, paintings), **artefacts** (man-made objects of historical importance), **monuments** (buildings) etc
- When evaluating sources, historians must be careful about **bias** (favouring one side over another), **exaggeration** (changing of the facts to make something more exciting, shocking etc), **prejudice** (forming an opinion about something or somebody before knowing all the facts) and **propaganda** (spreading of ideas to influence people to think a certain way)
- Different sources have different strengths and weaknesses – diaries can give very personal insights into the mind of a specific person from a specific time but could be very narrow in scope or be biased
- In Western society, history before the birth of Christ is labelled **BC** (Before Christ), and after is labelled **AD** (Anno Domini or ‘Year of Our Lord’) – thus the year 1 AD to the year 100 AD is called the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, 101 AD to 200 AD is called the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD and so on

### *Archaeology:*

- Archaeology means ‘the study of ancient things’ – it is concerned with **material remains**, i.e. buildings, objects, skeletons etc
- Archaeology is especially useful when studying periods of history **before the invention of writing** – when there are no written primary sources to consult, all the evidence we have is what remains below or above the ground, e.g. the Stone Age
- Archaeologist find places to dig or **excavate** in a number of ways – **ruins of old buildings** can point to a promising area, **old maps** can show buildings or sites that have since vanished above ground, **old myths and stories** can have elements of truth in them, **aerial photography** can show strange features of the landscape that might be missed if looking at ground level and sometimes **blind good luck** can see people discover treasures purely by accident
- Once a site has been found, archaeologists carefully fence it off and then divide it into sections that are numbered and lettered so that any finds can be recorded accurately – e.g. “a chalice was found in section D4”
- While digging, archaeologists use a wide variety of tools – shovels, pickaxes, mechanical diggers, trowels, brushes, buckets, sieves, pen and paper, string etc
- Any finds must be carefully recorded, labelled, packed away and classified
- Archaeologists can date finds by examining and counting the layers of earth (**stratigraphy**) – the more layers down the older the find is, by analysing the amount of **Carbon 14** still in the object or by using catalogues of tree rings going back thousands of years (**dendrochronology**)
- Archaeologists may have to work almost anywhere – deserts, mountains or even underwater – and thus are at the mercy of the weather, be it wind, hot sun, rain, damp etc
- In big cities, air pollution, traffic, construction deadlines etc make matters worse
- Archaeology can be of great benefit to the economy – spectacular finds will attract tourists who will spend money

# THE STONE AGE

## Overview:

- Stone Age covers many thousands of years so is divided for convenience into three periods – **Palaeolithic** (Early Stone Age), **Mesolithic** (Middle Stone Age) and **Neolithic** (New Stone Age)
- Ireland was covered in ice during the Palaeolithic, and thus no evidence for human habitation has been found for that period so we only study the two later periods – the Mesolithic and the Neolithic

## Mesolithic:

- Roughly from 8,000 BC to 3,500 BC
- First people arrive in Ireland at this time, possibly rowing across from Britain in **dugout canoes**
- Very few sites from this time have been discovered and there are **no written records** – archaeology thus very important in telling us about the period
- **All tools and weapons are made from stone** as no metals have been discovered yet
- Mesolithic people got food by **hunting and gathering** – hunting animals like deer, boar, fox and hare, fishing, and gathering wild apples, nuts and berries
- When food supplies in an area ran low, people would move elsewhere – they had a **nomadic** lifestyle
- Food was cooked over a fire on a **spit**
- Tools/weapons, mainly of **flint**, included axes, spearheads, scrapers, knives etc
- People probably clothed themselves in **animal skins** and lived in basket-like houses made from saplings driven into the ground (**post holes**) in a circle and pulled in and tied at the top with the walls and roof made from skins, reeds or sods of turf
- Our main source of evidence for this comes from the archaeological dig at **Mount Sandel** in Co. Derry

## Neolithic:

- Roughly from 3,500 BC to 2,000 BC
- New settlers seem to have arrived in Ireland bringing several new skills with them – **farming, bread-making, tomb-building, pottery-making** and **sewing/needlework**
- Farming – trees were cut down to make land available for planting of crops, land was ploughed with **mattocks**, crops like **wheat** and **barley** were grown, animals like **sheep** and **cattle** were reared, hunting and gathering does continue though, but as an extra supply of food rather than the only one
- Bread-making – corn was ground into flour between two stones and the flour was then made into bread
- Pottery-making – made from local clay, used to store food, drink or sometimes ashes of cremated dead
- Sewing/needlework – bone and **microlithic** (very small stone) needles have been found suggesting clothes were woven and sewn to fit rather than simple animal skins slung around the shoulders
- Tomb-building – three main types of **megalithic** (huge stone) tomb: (1) **Court Cairns**, (2) **Passage Graves** and (3) **Portal Dolmens**
- Court Cairns – consist of open space (**court**) at the front, which may have been used for religious gatherings, with a chamber originally covered by a mound of stones (**cairn**) behind, ashes of the dead placed inside along with **grave goods** for use in the next world, 300 still exist
- Passage Graves – large mounds of earth or stone up to 85 metres across with a passage leading inside the mound to a burial chamber where cremated remains and grave goods were placed, their size and positioning on hilltops suggest **powerful people were buried here**, 30 alone found in Co. Meath including **Newgrange**, whose **corbelled roof** is so well built that no rain has leaked in in over 5,000 years and the temperature is the same inside all year around, and shows us the importance of the sun to Neolithic people with the **roofbox** letting the sun hit the burial chamber at the end of the passage exactly every mid-winter's day on December 21<sup>st</sup>
- Portal Dolmens – called **portal** because they look like doorways, consisted of two large standing stone with massive **capstone** resting across the top, walls would have been filled in with smaller stones but these have long since been taken away, remains of dead and grave goods were placed inside, **Poulnabrone** Dolmen in Co. Clare had 22 bodies buried in it along with stone axes, bone necklaces etc
- The huge stones for these tombs may have been floated on rafts along rivers or rolled for miles on logs – hundreds of people from all over the countryside (no towns in Ireland yet) would have been needed, great skill in engineering, architecture and a knowledge of the stars and sun would all have been required