



Pre and Early Christian Ireland

History – Junior Cert

Quick Notes

Pre and Early Christian Ireland

From 2,500,000 years ago up until 2000 BC is called the Stone Age. This period became known as the Stone Age because these people used tools and weapons made from a type of stone called flint. The Stone Age can be split into three periods – The Early Stone Age (Paleolithic), the Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic), and the new Stone Age (Neolithic). The first farmer did not arrive in Ireland until 4000 BC, which involved them clearing forests, rearing animals and growing crops such as wheat and barley. Burial monuments were also introduced at this time. Court Cairns were the earliest type of tomb, passage tombs were the most spectacular type of burial chambers e.g. Newgrange and portal dolmens were named because of the two large upright stones at the entrance (portals) and the huge capstone placed on top (dolmen). The Bronze Age began around 3000 BC when people discovered bronze (a mixture of copper and tin). The most common type of burial chamber during the Bronze Age was the wedge tomb. Most Bronze Age settlements consisted of farmsteads with outhouses for storage and fields for growing crops and grazing animals. Most houses were circular, the walls were made of mud and straw and they had a thatched roof. Around 1000 BC marked the beginning of the Iron Age when people discovered iron which made tools and weapons more durable. The Celts first arrived in Ireland around 500 BC. They introduced new customs, weapons and a new form of writing called ogham which consisted of a combination of lines on a stone. The Celts lived in raths which were houses surrounded by a defensive ditch. Other types of dwellings during this period were ringforts, hillforts and crannógs. A day in the life of a Celt involved farming, growing wheat and rearing cattle, cooking using a fulacht fiadh, and metal working making bronze tools and weapons. Celtic Ireland was divided into about 150 kingdoms. Each kingdom had its own king who was chosen from the deirbhfhine or royal family. Members of the Aos Dána, such as historians, priests and musicians were a very important part of Celtic society. The Celts believed in life after death and they were pagans who worshipped many gods. From around the time Saint Patrick arrived in Ireland in AD 432, Ireland began to convert to Christianity. Many Irish people went to study in the monasteries in Europe around this time, when they returned to Ireland they set up their own monasteries. The first Irish monks were hermits and life in the monasteries was very strict. By AD 700, most Celts had converted to Christianity and this led to monastic treasures, stone crosses and round towers. During the period AD 400-800 the Vikings from Scandinavia raided Ireland. One of the earliest Viking settlements was Dublin as it was an important trading centre, with large numbers of merchants and craftsmen. The

Vikings were a pagan race believing in gods such as Thor and Odin. As the Vikings settled in Ireland, many converted to Christianity. At the beginning of the eleventh century, the Vikings became involved in a war with Gaelic chieftains which led to a final battle in Clontarf, Dublin in 1014. After this battle, the Vikings lost control of Dublin to the native Irish.

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