



The Bronze Age
History – Junior Cert
Quick Notes

The Bronze Age

Overview:

- Bronze Age in Ireland lasts from roughly 2,000 BC to 500 BC
- People now use bronze to make their weapons and tools – the Stone Age gradually comes to an end
- Bronze is an **alloy** of copper and tin – copper could be mined at Mount Gabriel in Co. Cork but tin would have been imported from Britain
- Metals were made stronger by **smelting** – heating **ore** to a high temperature then letting it drip through charcoal
- Bronze was **stronger** than stone but was also much **easier to shape** – these were the advantages

Farming:

- Improvements in farming meant hunting and gathering ceased to be necessary as extra source of food
- Better farming = healthier people = bigger population = competition for land = fighting, the discovery of Bronze Age weapons and the existence of **fortified homes** confirms the existence of warfare in Bronze Age Ireland
- Two main types of settlement: (1) **Crannógs**, man-made islands, defensive purpose, very expensive to build so only rich and powerful could afford them, access by boat or hidden stepping stones, (2) **Raths**, circular enclosure, surrounded by a ditch, protected by earth rampart and wooden fence, houses and storage areas inside, occasionally underground passage (**souterrain**) for escape or storage, animals brought inside at night, thousands once existed hence prevalence in **place names** today (Rathgar, Rathfarnham etc)
- Houses generally in same style as Stone Age – wattle and daub, stout posts, post holes etc

Daily Life:

- Clothes woven from sheep's wool, dyed with berries, bronze needles helped stitching
- **Rotary querns** used for grinding corn to make flour for bread, bronze pots used for cooking, bread, porridge, meat, fruit, fish etc were the daily diet
- Meat cooked in a **fulacht fiadh** – pit, lined with stones, filled with water, stones heated red hot in nearby fires and lowered into water to make it boil, meat lowered in wrapped in straw and left boil until ready to eat
- Tools made included sickles, axes, ploughs etc, weapons included swords, shields, spear tips etc – all made by smiths
- As skills developed smiths made bronze pots and cauldrons for cooking, horns for music and **jewellery** in gold and bronze like bracelets, armlets, earrings, necklaces, **lunulae** and **torcs**

Burial Customs:

- **Wedge tombs** were the only megalithic tomb built in Bronze Age Ireland – quite similar to Dolmens
- Due to the growing population, **Cist graves** were simpler, cheaper and therefore more common – stone rimmed grave dug and body buried in crouched or **foetal position** with grave goods for the next life
- Occasionally a mound of earth or **tumulus** was raised over a cist grave, sometimes marked by a standing stone or a **stone circle** – significance of stone circles is unclear but it seems to have again focused on the worship of the sun