

In the past, many people thought that Japhet, son of Noah, and his family were the first settlers in Britain after the Great Flood. Others said that Brutus, a prince of Troy, and his followers had settled in Britain, and that this was how Britain got its name.



They believed in dragons

The Romans took over England in AD 43. People in the 1600s and 1700s knew this, but they were hazy about the history that came before.



They believed that gods and nymphs lived in the rivers

Archbishop James Ussher calculated, using the Bible, that the world was created at teatime on Saturday 22 October 4004 BC. This date was wrong, but people believed it for hundreds of years.



When dinosaur bones were found, some people thought they belonged to a race of giants that once ruled England and had built Stonehenge. Others believed that King Arthur's sorcerer Merlin had built it using magic.



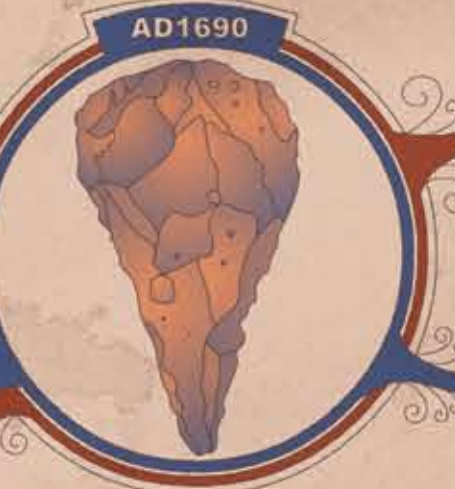
John Leland was the first man to call himself an 'antiquary'. An antiquary is someone who is interested in the things that were built or made by people who lived long ago. Today antiquaries are usually called archaeologists or historians.



Cabinets of curiosities were very popular in the 1600s and 1700s. Rich people had them in their houses; they were like miniature museums. They held stones, old coins, little bones, pieces of old fabric, carvings – one man had a mummified Frenchman's finger on display!



An axe head was discovered in London, buried in river gravel next to the tusk of a long-extinct animal, maybe a woolly mammoth. We now think the axe is Palaeolithic, perhaps 350,000 years old. When it was found, antiquaries guessed that the river gravel was left after Noah's Flood, the elephant had been brought by the invading Romans, and the axe head had been used by a Briton fighting the Romans (making it about 1,600 years old).



Three hundred years ago, three men arranged to meet every Friday night to talk about the antiquities (old things) found in Britain and around the world. This was the beginning of the Society of Antiquaries, set up 'to encourage the curious'.



England (including Wales) and Scotland signed the Act of Union and became 'Great Britain'.



Each week, the antiquaries brought their finds to the round table and talked about the places they had visited. They would decide which objects were the oldest and newest. In this way, they slowly and patiently started to work out when things were made. But they still thought that the earth began in 4004 BC.



People made fun of the antiquaries because they were interested in bits of old things, not just jewels and expensive treasure. They also joked that antiquaries would believe anything you told them.



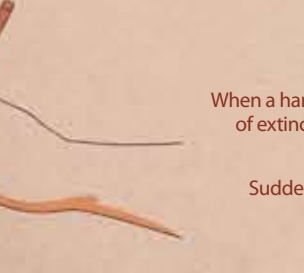
'A curious wish their fancies tickled To see how Royal folk were pickled.'

One antiquary, Richard Gough, loved to open old tombs to see what had been buried alongside dead kings and bishops. He was also interested in how the bodies had been preserved to keep them from rotting. Another antiquary cut off a lock of the dead King Edward IV's hair.



The Society paid artists to make careful drawings of important old carvings, paintings and buildings, to have a record of them in case they got damaged.

By now, antiquaries had learned that layers of soil underground came from different times – layers lower down were older than layers near the surface.



In 1831, Charles Darwin set sail aboard HMS Beagle to the Galapagos Islands, where he studied plant and animal evolution.



When a hand axe was found in Abbeville in France in the same layer as the bones of extinct animals, antiquaries realised that people had been around much, much longer than Archbishop Ussher had said.

Suddenly 'deep time' stretched out for thousands, even millions of years.



The 'Three-Age system' was set up by a man at the Museum of Denmark to sort out the jumbles of stone axes, skeletons, bronze ornaments and clay pots that were being brought to the museum by travellers returning from faraway places.



Charles Roach Smith bought old objects from builders working around London. He wanted to understand how London began and grew. He loved standing by the Thames as the gravel at the bottom was dug up. He rescued coins, Bronze-Age swords, spears and a shield from the river.



The invention of carbon dating means that now it is possible to know antiquities' exact age.



But we still don't know why Stonehenge was built!

ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MINERAL

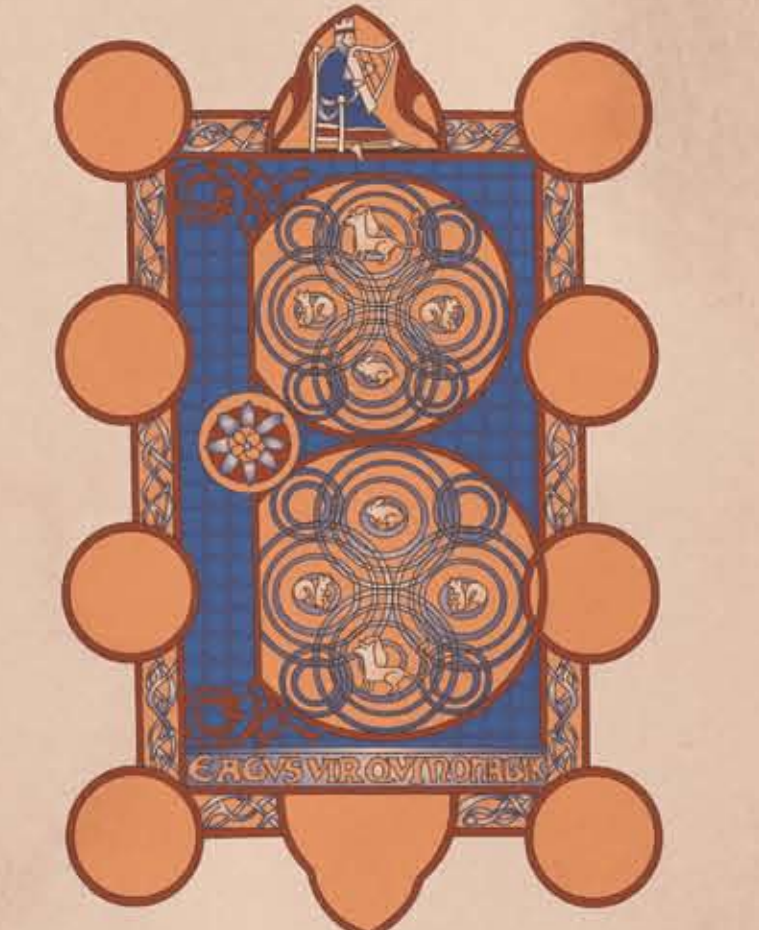


Archaeologists have to do a lot of guesswork.

Find the object that these pieces come from and complete the picture. (Warning! One or two of them are complete already. What were they used for?)

THE LINDSEY PSALTER

The Lindsey Psalter was drawn by monks 800 years ago and contains psalms in Latin from the Old Testament, a calendar and some prayers. This ornamented letter 'B' introduces Psalm 1. Three different kinds of animals are hidden in the initial. Can you find them? King David from the Bible is also in there, playing a musical instrument. What kind of instrument is he playing?



Why don't you draw your own initial here? Look at how the letter on the left has been drawn inside a frame. Maybe you'd like to decorate the letter with words or animals that start with your initial: if it's 'W', you might draw wings, webs, waves, whales, watering cans, wellington boots, washing-machines – or whatever you like ...

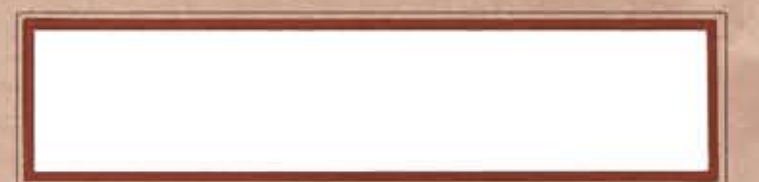


RUNES

Palaeographers study old writing. *Palaeo* in Greek means old and *graph* means writing.

Runes are early alphabets that were used in Britain from about AD 400. *Runa* means secret – the Anglo-Saxons believed that writing was magical and powerful.

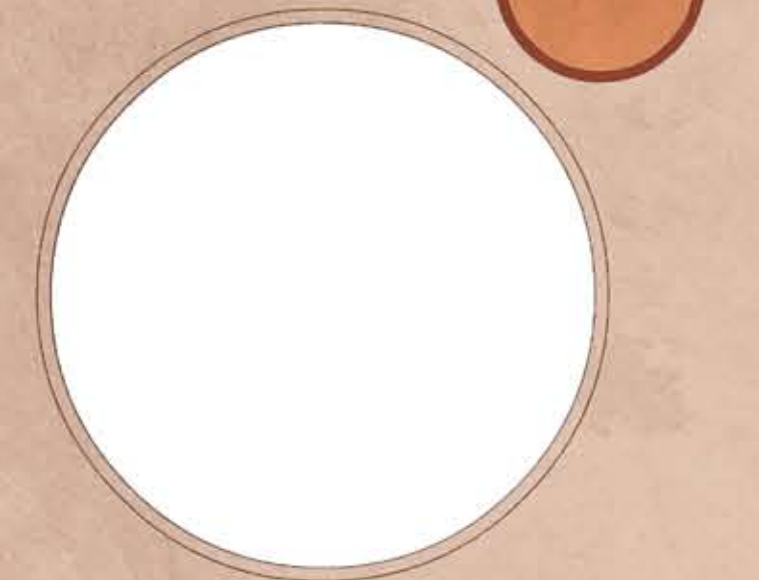
Write your name in runes. If your name contains 'q', 'v' or 'z', you will have to invent your own runes for those letters.



COINS

Antiquaries like to find old coins on a dig, because that means they can easily give a date to the objects found near them. William Stukeley was the first archaeologist to leave a coin behind him when he dug at an ancient place, so that people would know that someone from his time had been there.

Place a two-pence piece in the top right-hand corner. Draw a copy in the empty circle below.



The artists that worked for the Society of Antiquaries did extremely exact drawings. They would probably even have counted the number of ridges around the edge of the coin to be sure of getting the detail perfect.



COATS OF ARMS

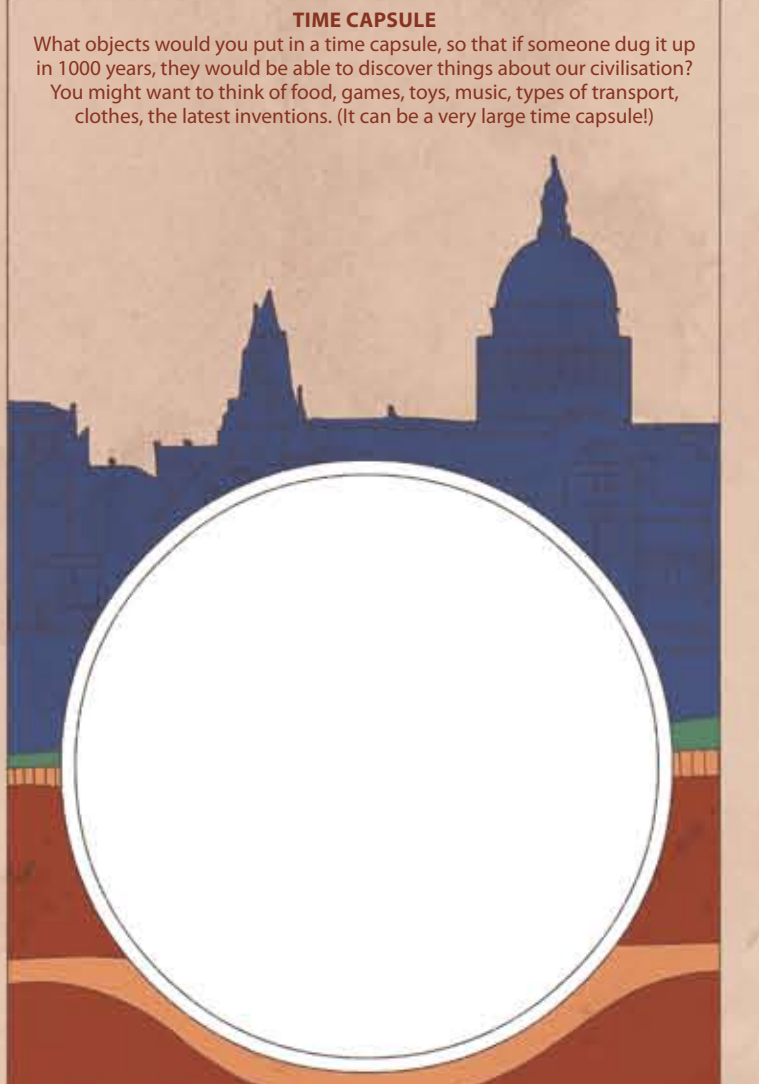
During the Middle Ages, knights used coats of arms to identify themselves in battle. They put big, bold designs on their shields because at the time, very few people could read or write.

The different stripes, patterns, symbols and animals (real and imaginary) all had different meanings. Coats of arms were passed on from generation to generation, as a sign of wealth and importance.



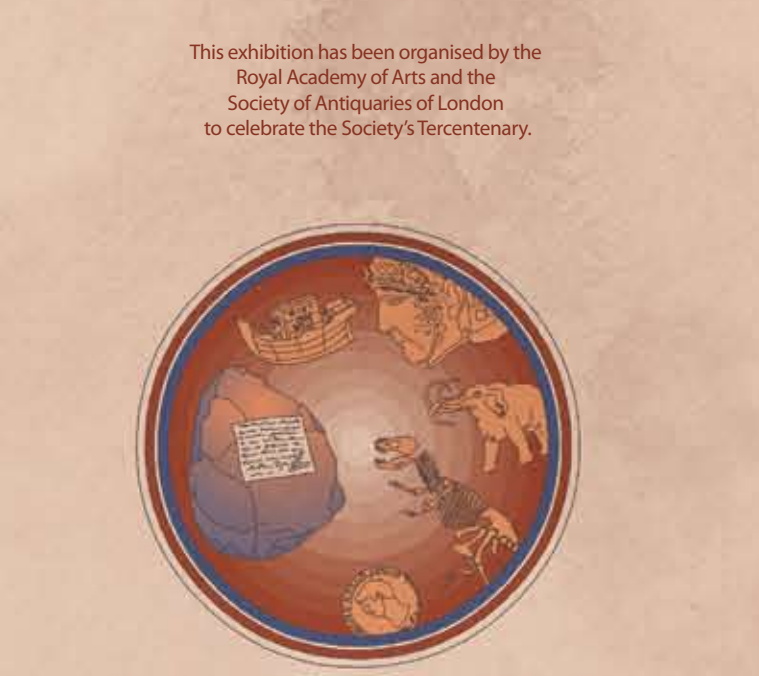
DESIGN YOUR FAMILY SHIELD

How would you sum up your family in pictures? Think of what your family likes to do, what work they do, what games they play. What about you?



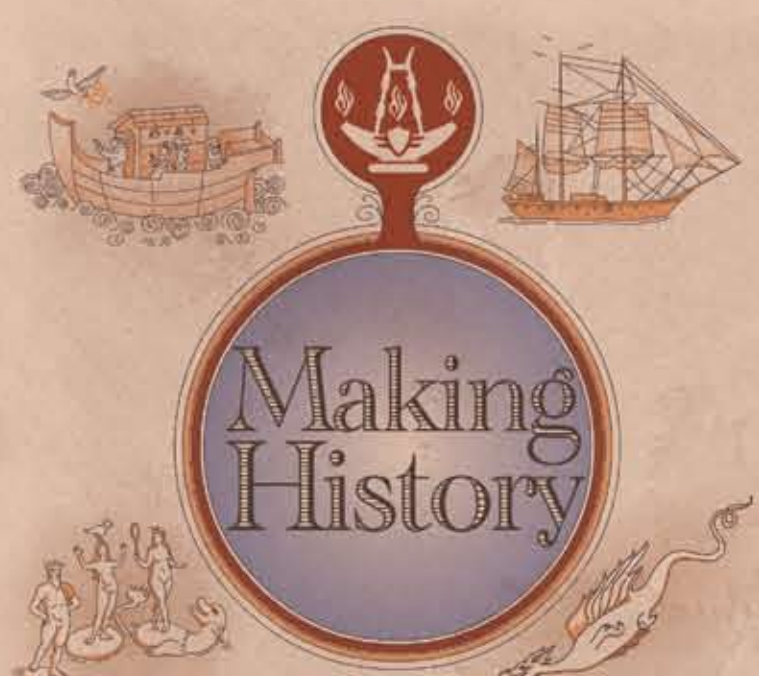
TIME CAPSULE

What objects would you put in a time capsule, so that if someone dug it up in 1000 years, they would be able to discover things about our civilisation? You might want to think of food, games, toys, music, types of transport, clothes, the latest inventions. (It can be a very large time capsule!)



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Antiquaries in Britain, 1707–2007

Main Galleries
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An Illustrated Guide

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