The Iron Age  800 BC to 43 AD

Britain was one of the last places in Europe to experience the new technology of iron-making. Bronze and copper had been produced in Britain since 2500BC but iron making techniques that had been developed in Central Anatolia around 2000BC took centuries to reach Britain as the skills travelled across Europe. The British Iron Age is generally considered to end with the successful Roman invasion of 43AD, however the Romans were also an Iron Age civilization, using the same technology.

Roundhouses were built in Britain during the Iron Age (although we have evidence of roundhouses as far back as the Neolithic). Rectangular houses are found in Europe during the same period. A small number of roundhouses are found on the Atlantic coast of Portugal, Spain and France and this suggests a possible cultural link between these places.

Little Woodbury

Built at Butser date: 2007

Original build date: 400-200 BC

Why built: to master the engineering of a large roundhouse.

The house is based on an archaeological excavation at the Little Woodbury Farm in Wiltshire.

The house has a 14.5m diameter. This is a big house for the Iron Age, there are a number of at this scale in Britain and they are classed as Wessex houses. There was a 100 year window of these large houses being built and then people went back to building 10m diameter houses. The oak used in the frame and walls weighs 12 tons.

The rafters are ash and alder weighing 4 tons, 1.5 tons of hazel in the wattle walls and 20 tons of daub. The straw for the thatch weighs 5.5 tons. The house took 9 months to build, by Simon Jaye and David Freeman with some help. The thatch lasts approximately 10-15 years. Upper half of roof leaks smoke more quickly, because the thatch is not as thick here. It is a very stable building, a chalk floor helps to minimise erosion.

David Freeman 2017