

Mesolithic

c.8500BC – c.4000BC

Hunters, gatherers and fishers moving around the Highlands.

Housing: Temporary housing – tents and caves.

Burial: None known.

Ritual: Speculation only.

Characteristic Finds: Middens with shells & bone fragments, stone tools & knapping debris, microliths.

Neolithic

c.4000BC – c.2500BC

First farmers and pottery.

Housing: Very few known in the Highlands. Perhaps rectangular timber construction.

Burial: Communal burials especially chambered cairns.

Ritual: Cup & ring marked stones, carved stone balls, stone axes, maceheads. In some places stone circles.

Characteristic Finds: Ritual objects, leaf-shaped arrowheads and pottery.

Chalcolithic and Bronze Age

c.2500BC – c.800BC

The first appearance of metals – gold and bronze.

Housing: Round houses ('hut circles').

Burial: Clava-type cairns, cist burials, urns in cremation pits.

Ritual: Small henges, bronze axeheads, metalwork hoards.

Characteristic Finds: Beaker pots, burnt mounds, barbed & tanged arrowheads.

Iron Age

c.800BC – c.1000AD

The first appearance of iron; fortified settlements.

Housing: A wide variety including round houses, brochs, duns, hillforts, crannogs.

Burial: Early Iron Age rare; later Iron Age long cist burials & barrow cemeteries.

Ritual: Sites leading underground or with water.

Characteristic Finds: Types of beads, pins, metalwork.

Pictish

c.300 – c.900AD

The later Iron Age peoples, comprising a number of tribes.

Housing: Few known or excavated.

Burial: Long cist burials & barrow cemeteries;
Christian burials after conversion.

Ritual: Objects associated with Christianity;
early monasteries.

Characteristic Finds: Pictish stones, metalwork.

Viking

c.800 – c.1000AD

Invaders and then settlers.

Controlled W. Isles til 13th c, N. Isles til 15th c.

Housing: Rectangular, bow-shaped houses, some
with byres.

Burial: In pagan period, graves with grave goods.
Conversion c. 10-11th c.

Ritual: Later period, churches.

Characteristic Finds: Scandinavian personal
ornaments and metalwork, silver hoards, runic
inscriptions.

Norse/Medieval

c.1000AD – c.1560AD

Scandinavian control to North; Lordship of the Isles to the West; Scottish kingdom gradually brings the north into its fold. Emergence of burghs, specialist workshops and industries.

Housing: Castles for the wealthy. Few others known, but appear to be rectangular.

Burial: Christian cemeteries, with distinctive gravestones.

Ritual: Churches, a few monasteries, possibly some holy wells.

Characteristic Finds: Currency, domestic remains like pottery & jewellery, cultivation remains.

Reformation to Industrial Revolution

c.1560s – c.1750AD

Emergence of clans, union with England and increased links to foreign trading networks, Jacobite risings, religious disputes.

Housing: Castles, then mansions for the wealthy.

Burial: Christian cemeteries, with distinctive gravestones.

Ritual: New style of churches.

Characteristic Finds: Some pottery, coins, jewellery.

Industrial Revolution - 21st Century

c.1750 – Present day

A time of increased industrialised activity.

Housing: From castles to hovels, shielings, mills. Some planned settlements. Cleared settlements.

Burial: Christian cemeteries.

Ritual: Churches, holy wells, amulets.

Characteristic Finds: A great many, but including evidence of transport, food cultivation and preservation, industry.

