

TEACHERS' NOTES: EARLY HISTORIC PERIOD

Kersons Cleugh

Excavations west of Longformacus in 2011 explored an abandoned settlement at the confluence of the Dye Water and Kersons Cleugh as part of work relating to the construction of a wind farm. The site had always been assumed to be medieval or later in date, but the excavations showed that the site was in use sometime during the 7th to 10th centuries AD, during the early historic period. The early historic period is also known as the Dark Ages because so little is known about life in Britain between the departure of the Romans in the 5th century AD and the beginning of the medieval period in the 12th century AD. The site at Kersons Cleugh is a rare example of an early historic settlement, giving us clues about life in Scotland at this time.

The building was constructed of turf and stones. Turves are a traditional building material, used in Scotland from prehistory right up to the post-medieval period. The vegetation in the turves continue to grow after the turves are laid in place, allowing the roots to consolidate the structure.



The remains of an early historic building at Kersons Cleugh
© CFA Archaeology



Paving in the entrance passage. The stone with a cup-mark on its upper surface is perhaps a pivot stone, on which a door would have swung © CFA Archaeology

The building was fairly rectangular in shape, with rounded corners. It was 5.6m by 3.1m, with an entrance in the north-east side and a paved entrance way. The location seems remote to us today, as it would have been in the early historic period. It may have been used only during the warmer months of the year, when livestock were brought to upland pastures.

The artefacts discovered tell us a little about their lives: spindle whorls show that they were spinning wool, and loom weights show that they were weaving this wool into cloth. Textiles are rarely found in archaeological settings since they rarely survive, but examples are known of woven fabrics made from flax and hemp (both classes as linen) and wool. Tools used in textile production also survive, as well as needles used in sewing garments together.



A blue-green glass bead may have been part of a necklace, perhaps formed of many beads or just a few. During the early historic period, beads were also sometimes carried in little pouches instead of worn.

Talking Points

What would it be like to live in a remote location hundreds of years ago?

What would make this more difficult? Think about things like illness/injury, food supplies, winter weather etc.

Activities and Resources

On the website you'll find a video about the site at Kersons Cleugh, a link to a video about spinning with a drop spindle (video by National Trust for Scotland but available via an independent YouTube channel), a videos on experimenting with spindle whorls and how to do some weaving with paper, and a worksheet with patterns for trying out more elaborate weaving techniques.

We suggest weaving with paper as an easily available resource but you can also weave with wool or even scraps of fabric, using string or yarn for your warp threads and cardboard for your loom. Cut up boxes work well - just cut notches along the top and bottom to hold your warp threads in place.