

Neolithic Terminology

As with any period in history there are a few technical words to master.

Once you can understand the jargon used by archaeologists then the past becomes easier to understand. In 1819 Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, the Curator of the National Museum of Antiquities in Copenhagen, Denmark, arranged the archaeological collection on the basis of the material with which the tools were made. So he divided up prehistory into a Stone Age, a Bronze Age and an Iron Age following the ideas first put forward by Professor Vedel-Simonsen of the University of Copenhagen in 1813.

As the Stone Age lasted so long it could be split up into different segments such as the Old Stone Age, the Middle Stone Age and the New Stone Age. Because educated men studied the Classics at this time, these segments were given Greek titles - using the Greek word for stone, *lithos*, as a base and qualified by the Greek words for ancient or early, *palaios*, middle or intermediate, *mesos* and new, *neos*. As a result of this, we end up using the terms Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic.

In the Channel Islands, the Neolithic period began about 7,000 years ago around 5000 BC. Jersey had just become an island as rising sea levels flooded the lower lying plains between Jersey and what was to become the mainland of Europe. Guernsey had been cut off about 2,000 years earlier.

The term Megalithic has the qualifier *megas* which means great. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the term microlith which the Greek word *mikros* - small as its qualifier.

Technical terms

Allée-Coudée	a middle-Neolithic passage grave in which the chamber was built at a sharp angle to the passage.
Allée Couverte	a rectangular chambered tomb with no passage or covering mound. Late Neolithic sites.
Armorica	Brittany and Lower Normandy.
Chalcolithic	the period of transition from stone to metal using industries.
Cist	a box made of stone slabs. Pronounced "kist".
Corbelled	the beehive shaping of a chamber by means of in-stepped roofing slabs.
Cromlech	a curved stone or stone circle. From the Breton <i>cromm</i> meaning curved and <i>lech</i> , a flat stone or slab.

Dolmen	a tomb with a large capstone. From the Breton <i>dol</i> meaning table and <i>maen</i> , a stone.
Dolerite	basalt-like stone used in the manufacture of axes. It is widely found throughout Armorica, the best known coming from the Seledin axe factory in the Cotes-d'Armor. A local industry was centred on the Pinnacle dolerite.
Gallery Grave	see Allée Couverte.
Jadeite	a dense green or black stone found in the Alps in what is now northern Italy/southern Austria, used in the manufacture of the fine, ceremonial axes.
Menhir	a standing stone. From the Breton <i>maen</i> meaning stone and <i>hir</i> , long.
Megalith	literally big stone from the Greek <i>megas</i> meaning great and <i>lithos</i> , stone.
Neolithic	the 'New Stone Age' - between about 5000 and 2500 BC in Brittany and about 4850 and 2250 BC in Jersey. This period saw the development of agriculture, pottery, polished stone axes and megalithic structures. It is sub-divided into the early, middle and late neolithic followed by the transitional chalcolithic period passing into the Bronze Age.
Orthostat	any upright stone but often used to refer to the erect sideslabs used in a megalithic structure.
Passage Grave	a megalithic monument consisting of a large rectangular, oval, or circular chamber entered by a narrow passage of varying length.
Peristalith	small kerb stones around the perimeter of a chambered tomb's mound.
Revetment	walling set up to support the mound of a chambered tomb.
Stele	a carved standing stone.