

History glossary for Senior Cycle

ages

The terms 'Bronze Age', 'Iron Age' and so on are used by archaeologists as a convenient shorthand for discussing the chronology of the past. In reality, the changes from one period to the next would have been far more gradual than these sharp distinctions imply. The accepted dates for these periods also vary in different parts of the world, because different areas developed at different times. Middle Eastern and Mediterranean civilisations, for example, developed metalworking before people living in Britain, so that their Bronze and Iron Ages arrived earlier.

anti-Semitism

Hostility and/or prejudice against Jews.

appeasement

Giving in to the demands of aggressive powers to avoid war, as long as those demands appear reasonable. Such a policy was pursued by Britain and France in dealing with Germany in the latter half of the 1930s.

archaeology

The study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of sites and the analysis of physical remains.

archives

A collection of documents or other records, especially those to do with the public or companies.

barbarian

A Greek word adopted by the Romans to refer to any people who did not adopt the Roman way of life. It is said to have come originally from the sound *bar-bar*, which, according to the Greeks, was supposed to be the noise that people made when speaking foreign languages.

Blitzkrieg

German for 'lightning war'. A military strategy used by the Germans at the beginning of World War II to achieve victory through a series of quick offensives, especially in Belgium, Holland and France. After an initial bombardment, armour and motorised infantry were mobilised rapidly to break the weakest parts of the enemy line.

Bolsheviks

Having split from the Russian Socialist movement in 1903, the Bolsheviks ('Majority') developed into a small, tightly organised,

revolutionary Marxist group led by Lenin, for whom violence was a legitimate instrument of power. In November 1917, they took control of a chaotic Russia, becoming the *de facto* rulers after the subsequent civil war. They then renamed themselves the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

bourgeoisie

The capitalist class that came to be known as the middle class, between the aristocracy and the working class. A new middle class of merchants and businessmen prospered throughout Europe from the 16th century, and especially in Britain, which Napoleon described as a 'nation of shopkeepers'. The term 'bourgeois' is used derogatorily to describe anything considered humdrum, unimaginative and/or selfishly materialistic.

Bronze Age

In Britain, this was the period – from about 2300 to 700 BC – when metal first began to be widely used, possibly as a result of the increase in contact with Europe.

capitalism

An economic system in which the production and distribution of goods depend on invested private capital and profit-making. Politically, this means the dominance of private owners of capital and production for profit. By extension, 'capitalism' has also taken in the belief that government should have nothing to do with the economy.

chivalry

The collective term for the social codes of knighthood that originated in France in the Middle Ages. It was based on brave, courteous and honourable behaviour – what came to be known as 'gentlemanly conduct' – and was the subject of much medieval literature. Orders of knighthood, such as the Knights of the Garter, are called 'chivalric' orders. [Find out more](#)

Cold War

A state of hostility without actually fighting. This existed between the United States (and its allies) and the USSR (and the Communist bloc) from the final days of World War II to the end of Communist rule in the Soviet Union (now Russia) in 1991. The era was marked by the fear of nuclear holocaust, which some politicians and theorists regarded as the ultimate deterrent. The term originated in a speech by Bernard Baruch, financier and special adviser to US president Harry Truman, in 1947.

communism, Communism

The theory ('communism' with a small 'c'), similar to socialism, that advocates a society in which all property is publicly owned and each person works and is paid according to his or her needs and abilities. Political Communism (with a large 'C'), established in Russia and elsewhere in the 20th century, was based on Marxism. It held that economic equality would only ever be achieved through revolution.

conservatism

A political philosophy or attitude that emphasises respect for traditional institutions, distrust of government activism and opposition to sudden change in the established order.

cropmarks

These are light and dark marks visible in growing and ripening crops, especially via aerial photography, which reflect the differences in the subsoil beneath. Thus parched lines of grass may indicate hidden stone walls or packed stone layers such as Roman roads, and much greener grass may be growing over pits, ditches or gulleys. Very large numbers of cropmark sites have been found in Britain since the 1960s.

Dark Ages

A term given by some to the centuries in Europe immediately after the Roman period, from about AD 400. It is very difficult archaeologically to see what happened within this timespan as far as settlement, farming and so on are concerned. In most of Britain, people stopped using and making pottery, ceased producing and using coins, built in wood (which has rotted away) rather than stone and, in many other ways, have denied archaeologists the wealth of inorganic and concrete evidence they are used to from the Roman centuries. However, the period was not 'dark' at all except by comparison to the Roman period with its consumer and commercial society, which is much more like our own and which some archaeologists find more satisfying.

Darwinism

The school of thought, originating in the late Victorian era, in which some of the ideas of Charles Darwin (1809-82) – natural selection, evolution, survival of the fittest and, above all, progress – were applied to modern society. Social Darwinists argued that the poor had only themselves to blame for their poverty. However, by the 1880s, the struggle of the 'fittest' for survival was seen less in terms of individuals in the marketplace – competitive individualism – and more in terms of nations fighting for a place in the sun. Some of Darwinism's adherents in

Britain stated that, because the Britons were the fittest race and so the likeliest to survive, they had the right to colonise the world. This type of racism became a way of justifying imperialism.

deflation

The opposite of inflation, this is the process through which prices decline. It is almost always a sign of a depression.

dendrochronology

A way of dating material from archaeological sites where wood has survived. It is based on the idea that the growth rings of trees – oak has so far been studied – vary from year to year according to weather conditions, and that patterns of greater and lesser growth can be compared from tree to tree and from area to area. By working backward from surviving trees, from timbers in old houses and in even earlier churches, and from timbers from excavated sites, a 'master chronology' can be built up. Any timber discovered in buildings or in waterlogged deposits can then be compared with the growth rings already known. If the outer rings of the tree – the sapwood – are present, a very precise date can be suggested for when the tree was felled. As most wood in the past seems to have been worked and used 'green', such a date will be very close to that of the construction of the feature under investigation.

depression

The state of an economy when the output of goods and services is slowing sharply or even declining, unemployment rises and prices decline.

Fascism

The name comes from the Latin *fasces* – a bundle of rods with a projecting axe, which was the symbol of authority in ancient Rome. The term was applied by Mussolini to his movement after his rise to power in 1922. The Fascists were viciously anti-Communist and anti- liberal and, once in power, relied on an authoritarian state apparatus. They also used emotive slogans and old prejudices (for example, against the Jews) to bolster the leader's strongman appeal. Fascism had a direct influence on Hitler's Nazism.

feudalism

Tiered class system of medieval Europe in which land owned by someone of higher status was lived on and worked by someone of lower status in return for loyal service. The monarch was at the top of the pyramid, the peasants at the bottom. Feudalism began on the Continent as far back as the 8th century as a means of ensuring protection for powerful rulers

against other powerful rulers. During the Middle Ages, certain provinces or countries recognised other kings as their feudal overlords.

free trade

Also known as *laissez-faire* (French for 'leave well alone'), free trade means no taxes on manufacturing goods and no tariffs paid when goods cross a border. It was an idea dear to the hearts of Victorian manufacturers and industrialists, who believed that anything that impeded free trade would reduce their profits. The concept was articulated by the 18th-century Scottish economist Adam Smith, who argued in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that trade flourishes best when it is left entirely free of government interference.

genocide

According to the Genocide Convention of 1948, 'genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. Examples of genocide in relatively recent history include the destruction of the Armenians by the Turks during World War I, the extermination of European Jewry by the Nazis before and during World War II (the Holocaust) and the murder of some 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994. In recent times, the term 'ethnic cleansing' has become a 'polite' way of describing some of the genocidal events that have occurred in, for example, Kosovo in the former Yugoslavia and East Timor, once part of Indonesia.

guerrillas

From the Spanish for 'little war', the word first described the hit-and-run rebels who fought against the installation of Napoleon's brother Joseph on the throne of Spain in 1808. Guerrilla warfare later became the main feature of the conflicts in such countries as Vietnam and Algeria.

imperialism

Strictly speaking, rule by empire – that is, a powerful country's policy of acquiring dependent territories as colonies, which can then be exploited for material or political gain. Imperialism reached its peak in 1914, when almost 85% of the world's land surface was controlled by a handful of colonial powers, mostly European, but also including the United States

and Japan. Today the term has come to mean the extension of a powerful country's influence through trade, diplomacy and the like.

industrialisation

The development of industry on a large scale. Industrialism is an economic system that is based on industry and the mass production of consumer goods.

inflation

The process by which the prices of goods and services rise in terms of money. In gold or silver inflation, the price of goods in terms of gold or silver rises, due to an increase in the quantity of gold or silver used as money. The opposite of inflation is deflation.

Iron Age

In Britain, the period from about 700 BC to AD 43 – following the Bronze Age and before the Roman period – when the working and use of iron gradually becomes evident. It is characterised in Britain by the construction of large fortified hillforts and the full exploitation of the landscape with numerous farmsteads and extensive field systems.

isolationism

A policy of not participating in or withdrawing from international affairs, especially as practised by US governments during the first half of the 20th century.

liberalism

A term that gained significance in the 19th century, when it meant the limiting of government power and the increase of social reform. In the 20th century, capitalist democracies occasionally described themselves as 'liberal' to indicate that they didn't attempt to control thought and action to the same extent as Communist regimes. However, over time, the term has become derogatory, used by the right wing to denigrate the left.

Marxism

The political and economic theories of the German philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883), who predicted the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the lower and working classes and the eventual attainment of a classless communist society.

Mesolithic

The last part of the hunter-gatherer period and the middle part of the Stone Age, between the Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) and the Neolithic (New Stone Age) when agriculture and animal husbandry were

introduced. In Britain, where it lasted from approximately 10,000 to 4500 BC, it was marked by sophisticated groups of hunter-gatherers who used spears and harpoons incorporating very small sharp blades called microliths.

Middle Ages

In Britain, this is usually interpreted by historians as the period between 1066 (the Norman Conquest) and 1485 (the accession of the Tudors). In fact, the decade 1530-40, which includes the dissolution of the monasteries, was much more significant and marks a more realistic end to the Middle Ages. Some archaeologists and historians now use the term 'medieval' for the period, comprising about 1,000 years, that extends from the end of the Roman occupation to the time of the Tudors. It can then be divided into the 'early medieval', lasting up to the Normans, and the 'high medieval' after that.

mummy

The body of a human being or animal embalmed for burial. Ancient Egypt is particularly renowned for its mummies, but they have been produced in ancient cultures throughout the world.

nationalism

The belief that groups of people are bound together by territorial, cultural and (sometimes) ethnic links. Although nationalism developed in the 19th century and led to the formation of the nations of Germany and Italy, it was the cause of some of the most dramatic events of the 20th century. Developing as an ideological response to some of the social, economic and political uncertainties of the modern world, it was often used by political activists to mobilise people against their rulers, especially when these were 'foreigners', as in the Austro-Hungarian empire before World War I.

Neolithic

The Neolithic, or New Stone Age, is the last period of the Stone Age , when many innovations were introduced, including monument building, the first engineering projects, the use of pottery and, most importantly, the domestication of plants and animals so that hunter-gathering was no longer the only or perhaps even the main way of obtaining food. In Britain, the Neolithic lasted from around 4500 to 2300 BC, and many of the most famous ancient monuments, including the first phases of construction at Stonehenge and Avebury, date from this period. *See also ages.*

oligarchy

From the Greek for 'rule of the few', this is a form of government in which power is centralised in the hands of an organised élite and is used for their social and/or economic benefit. Their power is maintained by force or by the shaping of the law to restrict the people and/or remove any need to consult them or be accountable to them. Many of the monarchies established in Europe during the Middle Ages began as oligarchies, with one family eventually gaining ascendancy over others.

Palaeolithic

The term for the Old Stone Age, the immensely long period of hunter-gatherers extending from the time when humans first evolved until about 10,000 BC. In Britain, the earliest evidence of human activity dates from approximately 450,000 years ago, although there are long periods (of 100,000 years or more) when there appears to have been no human presence. The period has been divided by archaeologists into the Lower (the oldest), Middle and Upper Palaeolithic to indicate when social and technological developments – mainly increasingly sophisticated flint tools – occurred. Neanderthals were supplanted by *Homo sapiens*, modern humans, during this epoch.

palaeontology

The branch of science that deals with extinct and fossilised animals and plants.

plebiscite

A vote of an entire nation or other large political unit on a question of great importance. As there are no candidates, a plebiscite is not an election.

protectionism

'Protection' means charging foreign traders a tax, or tariff, when their goods enter your country. In 1815, the British Parliament, which was dominated by the landed gentry, passed the Corn Laws, which placed a high tariff on foreign corn (a term for different types of grain, not just maize) thus making it unprofitable to import. The aim was to protect British farmers from being undersold by cheaper grain from the Continent. The Corn Laws, however, did not lead to prosperity, but to bread shortages and hunger for the working classes.

Protestant

A member of a Western Christian church whose faith and practice are founded on the principles of the Reformation, especially in

Puritan

A radical Protestant. Influenced by European Protestants, and especially by John Calvin in Switzerland, Puritans emerged in Britain during the mid-1550s. Essentially fundamentalists, they usually believed in a much stricter version of religion than prevailed in the state Church. They were often derided as killjoys because of their opposition to swearing, drunkenness and sexual licence.

Raj, the

The term – from the Hindu word for 'reign' – is used to describe British sovereignty in India from the mid-18th century until the establishment of the state of India in 1947. They established a mixed form of government, ruling that huge country through a network of Indian politicians and civil servants. As such, the Raj, although outwardly monolithic and magnificent, always rested precariously on the good will of the Indians.

Reformation

The complex process of the 16th century by which various European countries stopped being Roman Catholic and became Protestant.

referendum

A direct vote in which an entire electorate accepts or rejects a proposal. The term is similar to plebiscite but, unlike the latter, is usually used to describe decision-making votes on things of lesser importance than a change of sovereignty – for instance, constitutional amendments, laws or specific government policies. Although they can be seen as a form of direct democracy, many politicians believe that referendums undermine the basis of representative democracy.

Renaissance

Meaning 'rebirth', this is the name given to the European trend (c. 1400-c. 1600) in which intellectuals and artists developed a passion for the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome. Originating in Italy, this movement of revived classical learning spread all over Europe. Everywhere, the new ideas that arose from this, including humanism (which put humans, rather than God or nature, at the centre of the universe), struggled with traditional superstition and ignorance.

revisionism

Strictly, revisionism is the theory or practice of revising one's attitude to a previously accepted situation or point of view. In historical terms, it is usually applied to a new theory that upsets what has been commonly believed about an era, individual, event and so on. However, in recent years, the term has become somewhat tarnished by the campaigns by

some to change the accepted views of certain events for ulterior motives. A prominent example of this is Holocaust denial.

Saxon

A descendant of the Germanic tribes who lived in northern Germany and who, in the 5th and 6th centuries, invaded and conquered England with the Angles and Jutes.

socialism

A political and economic theory of social organisation that advocates that the community as a whole should own and control the means of production.

Stoicism

The most important philosophy in Rome. Its adherents insisted on the importance of accepting all situations with *virtus* – toughness or manliness. It arose from a Greek school of philosophy founded by Zeno in c. 308 BC, and took its name from the porch (*stoa*) in Athens where he taught.

Stone Age

A catch-all phrase for the period of human prehistory characterised by the use of stone tools. In Britain, the Stone Age covers a huge span of time – from the first traces of human occupation in about 450,000 BC to the first metalworking at the beginning of the Bronze Age, around 2300 BC.

Archaeologists prefer the more clearly defined periods: Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic, which are themselves divided up into shorter sub-periods.

utilitarianism

This philosophy judges everything in terms of its utility or usefulness. When examining an institution, such as the law, Parliament or the Church, utilitarians ask the question: Does it work? If the answer is no, then it has to be changed to make it more effective, or abolished. Utilitarianism was inspired by the ideas of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) who believed that humans act out of self-interest according to the pleasure–pain principle: what motivates people is the desire to avoid pain and to seek pleasure. To be successful, a social policy has to offer either reward or punishment, and social reform based on the pleasure–pain principle will ultimately achieve the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'.