

Megalithic Rock Art

The Stone Age began in Ireland around 8000 BC and lasted until about 2500 BC, when it was followed by the Bronze Age.

The Neolithic is the third phase of the Stone Age. It began around 4000 BC and is when people learned how to farm. People also began building large stone tombs, called megalithic tombs, to bury their dead. Many of these tombs were carved with special decoration called Megalithic Art.

At the Museum, there is a replica Passage Tomb. A passage tomb is just one type of tomb that people built and used during the Stone Age, to bury their dead.

At the Museum's Prehistoric Ireland Exhibition you can see some decorated megalithic stones from Ireland dating to the Stone Age and Bronze Age

Selection of flint objects.
Grange, Co. Limerick, Neolithic.



Decorated megalithic stone. Kilwarden,
Co. Kildare, Early Bronze Age.

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Passage Tombs and Megalithic Art

Many passage tombs were decorated with art called megalithic art. Some of this art was carved into the rock, using a sharp tool and a hammer. Other decoration was incised, by scratching the decoration onto the rock. People used a lot of different shapes for the decoration. They used circles, spirals, zig-zags, waves, triangles, and lines. Although we will never know what all of these shapes represent, it is thought that circles and spirals may represent the sun, and waves and zig-zags may represent water.



The most famous passage tomb in Ireland is Newgrange, in Co. Meath. It was built during the Neolithic, around 3200 BC. Here, a lot of the stones are decorated with megalithic art. Newgrange is famous because on the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year, the rising sun shines through a light-box above the doorway, and lights up the tomb.

Do you have any ideas what the shapes seen on megalithic tombs might represent?



1. Passage Tomb at Newgrange, Co. Meath. ©Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland.

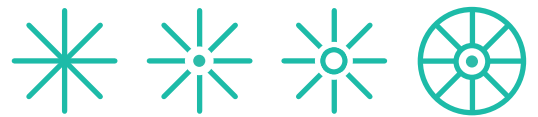
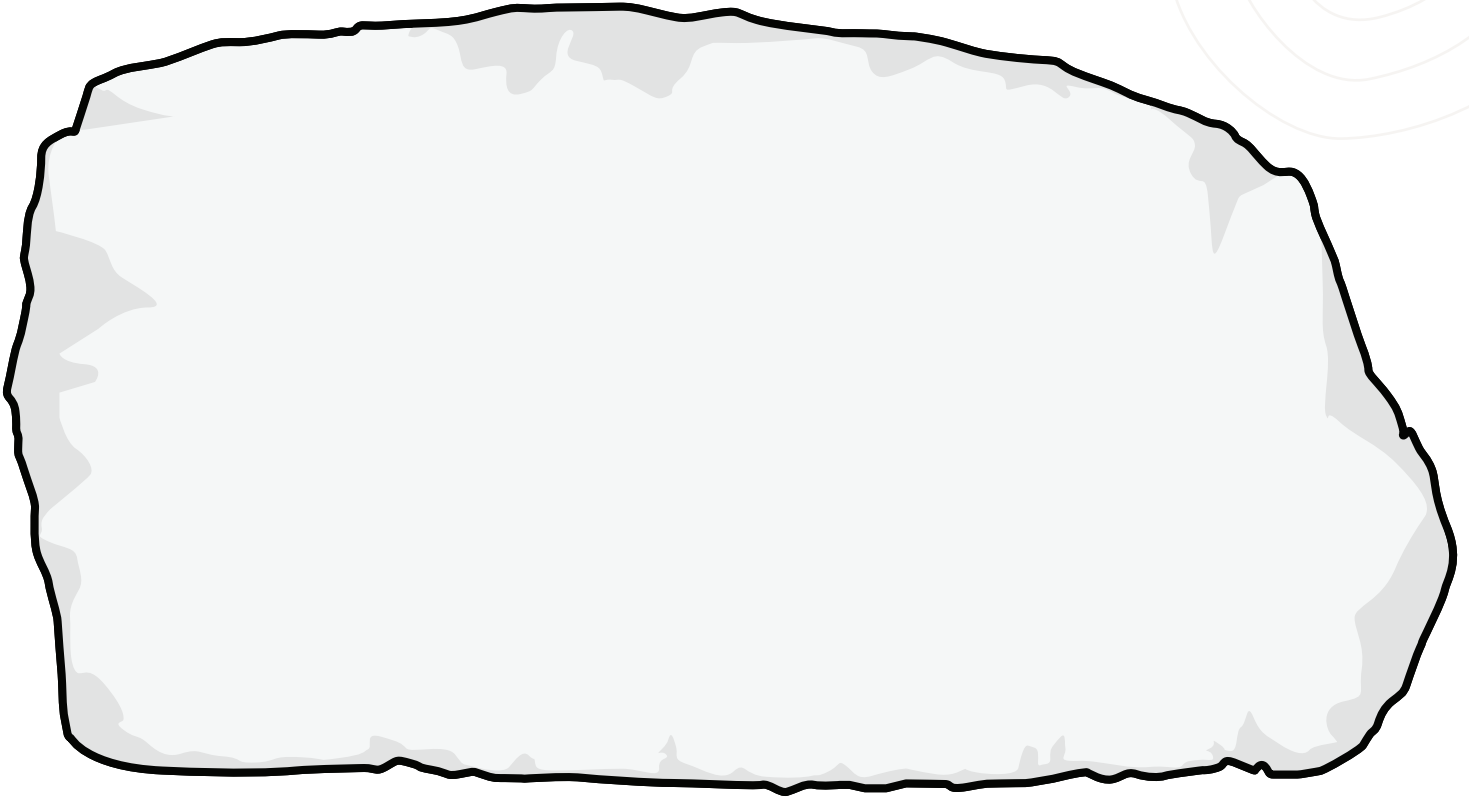
2. Entrance to Passage Tomb at Newgrange, Co. Meath. ©Photographic Archive, National Monuments Service, Government of Ireland.

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Decorate a Megalithic Stone

Use the megalithic art decorations at the bottom of the page to give you some ideas to decorate this megalithic stone



Megalithic Rock Painting

Why not collect some rounded pebbles and stones? You can use paint to decorate them with some megalithic art to create your own little megalithic stones at home.

You can use your Megalithic Rock as a paper weight, a decorative rock in your garden, or even as a door stopper!

What do you need?

- **Rounded pebbles or stones**
- **Paint brush**
- **Poster or acrylic paint**
- **Jar of water to wash your paint brushes**
- **Some old newspaper, to keep the table clean**
- **PVA glue or clear nail varnish**

Method:

1. Wash and dry the rocks or pebbles to make sure they are clean
2. While they are drying, set up an area to paint your stones and put down some old newspaper
3. Paint and decorate your stone however you would like. You can use the examples of megalithic art on the previous page to give you some ideas
4. Leave to dry overnight
5. If you want to glaze your stone after painting it, let the paint dry, then paint over it with PVA glue or clear nail varnish

Top Tip: You can collect rocks and pebbles at the beach, but please don't disturb any animals or sea creatures when collecting them, and don't take any more than you need!

