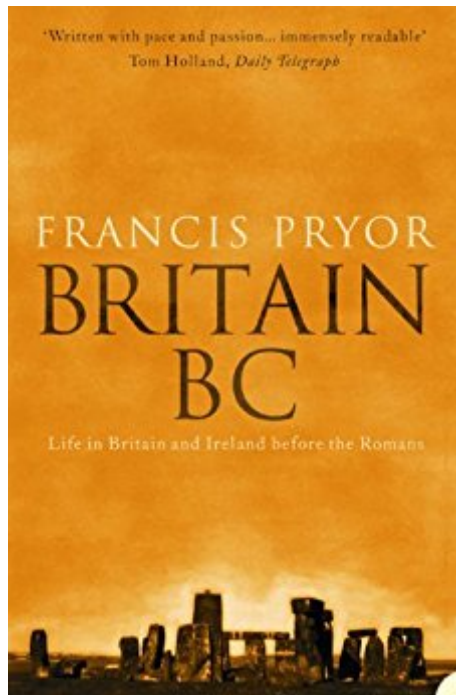




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Britain BC: Life In Britain And Ireland Before The Romans (Text Only)



Synopsis

An authoritative and radical rethinking of the history of Ancient Britain and Ancient Ireland, based on remarkable new archaeological finds. British history is traditionally regarded as having started with the Roman Conquest. But this is to ignore half a million years of prehistory that still exert a profound influence. Here Francis Pryor examines the great ceremonial landscapes of Ancient Britain and Ireland – “Stonehenge, Seahenge, Avebury and the Bend of the Boyne” – as well as the discarded artefacts of day-to-day life, to create an astonishing portrait of our ancestors. This major re-evaluation of pre-Roman Britain, made possible in part by aerial photography and coastal erosion, reveals a much more sophisticated life in Ancient Britain and Ireland than has previously been supposed. This edition does not include illustrations.

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Customer Reviews

Pryor is candid about his intentions. He wants to understand the society of his homeland. To gain that understanding, he's dug more holes than "found in Blackbourne, Lancashire". He's also swept the literature of prehistoric Britain to learn what his colleagues have revealed in their work. The result is a compelling narrative of how Britain, in the years before the Roman invasion, lived,

worshipped and died. He's gone a step further in trying out the life for himself. It all boils down to what might be an exercise in chauvinism, but Pryor's too professional to sink into that morass. Instead, he's given us a superb overview of the roots of the British Isles. He also provides an superlative insight into the workings of modern archaeology. The title reflects Pryor's view that too much attention has been paid to the Roman era. Christianity's invasion on Roman skirt-tails, of course, has diverted attention from the beliefs of pre-Roman peoples. He wants to set that record straight, and does so thoroughly and admirably. Drawing on a wealth of resources, he casts away the "invasion" foundation of British pre-history to build a new structure. Sweeping hordes give way to a society that spread cultural innovations through limited, but far-reaching mobility. Instead of defensive fortresses, the British Isles are pocked with "henges", religious centres reflecting a stable, ancestor-worshipping society. Henges, he reminds us, totally lack defensive features. Weapons are found as often in bogs and streams, or buried with owners. They aren't the detritus of battle. Pryor's start is the now-famous site of Boxgrove. His account of the finds there, a stone tool preparation site nearly half a million years old, is nearly as vivid as Mike Pitts' own.

Francis Pryor's Britain BC is one of the most readable and certainly one of the most enjoyable archaeology books I have ever read. Pryor brings Britain's prehistory to life, no small task given that he is dealing with nonliterate peoples, vast amounts of time and, given the nature of the field, data that tends to be scattered at many sites. He has been criticized for both his "at-ease" writing style and at the same time for being too technical in parts. I find that he walks the line between archaeological scholar and archaeological popularizer extremely well. He is a fluid writer who must at times dig more deeply into the data to make a point. One needs to be aware of his goal in this book. In the several archaeology courses I had in my college days, I became aware of what a solid archaeology text is like. It is the combination of the latest data and methodology organized in a way so that a student can bring the work to bear in future courses or careers. Such books are often "dry" but that is not a criticism if the goal is to lay a firm groundwork for future field work or coursework in archaeology. But Pryor's goal is not that. It is, as he puts it in the Preface, to get across to the reader his fascination with the "story" of early humans in Britain. His readership is not primarily intended to be future archaeologists, though they would also learn a great deal here. His goal is to get the general educated reader to experience the excitement and, frankly, the fun of the dig, the joy of discovery and the amazement at our ancestors' accomplishments. Understandably, Pryor views the Romans as destructive of an indigenous people, though he points out that the early prehistory of Britain continued to live on.

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