

Erith and its prehistory

Archaeological finds in the Erith area date back to the Palaeolithic period.

There is evidence to suggest settlements in Erith in the Palaeolithic (c.500,000 - c.9,000 BC), Mesolithic (c.9,000 - 4,300 BC), and Neolithic (c. 4,300 - 2,000 BC) periods and in the Bronze (2,000 - 650 BC) and Iron (650 BC - AD43) Ages. There have been several flint artefacts, including two axes from the Palaeolithic period discovered in Erith, which suggest that there were settlers in that area in the Palaeolithic era.

There have been findings from the Mesolithic period, which also suggests a settlement in the Erith area. Eleven 'tranchet' axes have been found by the Thames in Erith, and two flint artefacts, dating in between the Mesolithic and Bronze Age, which were recorded on top of the natural sands and gravels at a site adjacent to Erith Deep Water Wharf, between Crescent Road and Manor Road.

There have been Neolithic discoveries as well. For example, two beakers have been found in gravel workings near Erith in what were thought to be grave pits. They are about six inches high and are decorated by horizontal bands. Replicas of these vessels are in the Bexley museum collection. Also, near Erith, remains of a prehistoric boat were discovered in a peat bed in the Marshes. We can identify it to be Neolithic as it contains a polished flint axe-head and a scraper (from the Neolithic period).

Moreover, Bronze and Iron Age discoveries also suggest settlements in Erith at those times. From the Bronze Age a rapier and sword have been discovered from the Thames near Erith, along with a socketed axe, also from the Erith area. Furthermore, two Iron Age coins were discovered in Erith, which is strong evidence of a small settlement.

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Sources (available at Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre):

Tester, P. (1985). The archaeology of the Bexley area. Bexley: Bexley Libraries and Museums Department.

Wheeler, L. (1997). Erith Deep Water Wharf : an archaeological assessment. Museum of London Archaeology Service.