In 1900 the archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans (1851-1941) discovered a large number of clay tablets inscribed with mysterious symbols at Knossos on Crete. Believing he had discovered the palace of King Minos, together with the Minotaur's labyrinth, Evans dubbed the inscriptions and the language they represented as 'Minoan'.

Evans spent the rest of his life trying to decipher the inscriptions, with only limited success. He realised that the inscriptions represented three different writing systems: a 'hieroglyphic' script, Linear A and Linear B.

The hieroglyphic script appears only on seal stones and has yet to be deciphered. Linear A, also undeciphered, is thought to have evolved from the hieroglyphic script, and Linear B probably evolved from Linear A, though the relationship between the two scripts is unclear.

Evans figured out that short lines in Linear B texts were word dividers. He also deciphered the counting system and a number of pictograms, which led him to believe that the script was mainly pictographic. Evans also discovered a number of parallels between the Cypriot script, which had been deciphered, and Linear B. This indicated that the language represented by Linear B was an ancient form of Greek, but he wasn't prepared to accept this, being convinced that Linear B was used to write Minoan, a language unrelated to Greek.

In 1939, a large number of clay tablets inscribed with Linear B writing were found at Pylos on the Greek mainland, much to the surprise of Evans, who thought Linear B was used only on Crete.

Micheal Ventris (1922-56) was the person who eventually deciphered Linear B in 1953. His interest was sparked in 1936 on a school trip to an exhibition about the Minoan world organised by Arthur Evans. For the next 17 years, Ventris struggled to understand Linear B. At first he was sceptical that the language of Linear B was Greek, even though many of the deciphered words resembled an archaic form of Greek. Later, with the help of John Chadwick, an expert on early Greek, he showed beyond reasonable doubt the Linear B did indeed represent Greek.

Linear B syllabary
Linear B logograms

These logograms stand for whole words and mainly represent items that were traded. As Linear B was used mainly for recording transactions, this is not surprising. Some of the logograms resemble the things they represent, so could be called pictograms. Not all the logograms have been deciphered.
Linear B syllabary - the ancient script of Crete

Links

Free Linear B font
http://www.csupomona.edu/~jcclark/fonts/

Further details of Linear B
http://www.ancientscripts.com/linearb.html

Linear B Glossary - word in Linear B with transliteration, Modern Greek version and English translation: http://www.geocities.com/kurogr/

ALPHABETUM - a Unicode font for ancient languages by Juan-José Marcos, Professor of Classics, Plasencia, Spain.

Includes: Old Italic (Etruscan, Oscan, Umbrian, Picene, Messapic) Classical & Medieval Latin, Ancient Greek, Coptic, Linear B, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Gothic, Runic, Ogham, Cypriot, Phoenician, Kharosthi, Iberic, Celtiberic, Old & Middle English, Cuneiform Scripts (Ugaritic and Old Persian) and Medieval Nordic (Old Norse and Old Icelandic). Also Includes Characters For Latin-Based European Languages, Cyrillic-Based Languages, Devanagari, Bengali, Hiragana, Katakana and Bopomofo)

Other complex scripts

Ancient Egyptian, Chinese, Ch•-nôm, Japanese, Jurchen, Khitan, Linear B, Mayan, Naxi, Nushu, Tangut (Hsihsia)