

Hands On Learning

with Reading Museum Service

ROMAN COSTUME & JEWELLERY

AH 32/B

Bracelets

Bracelets long pre-dated the arrival of Romans in Britain. One of the examples in this box is made of two strands of twisted bronze wire - a type that is very common. Wire bracelets like this often ended with the threads twisted to form two hooks, or a hook-and-eye arrangement, so that the bracelet could be opened and fitted onto the wrist easily. This example may once have had such features, but if so they have long since disappeared.



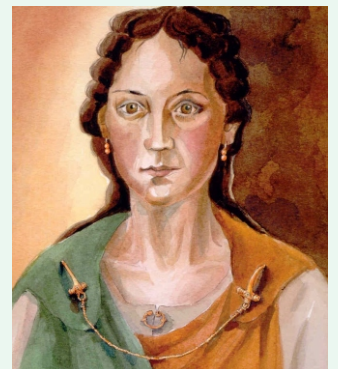
The bracelet alongside it has had one of its ends flattened and there is a trace of a pin in it - this must have been part of a mechanism for closing it. The pattern on this example is fairly simple, consisting of a series of notches and grooves which would have been cut or filed by its maker.

The third bracelet is a simple, bangle type.

Brooches

Fibulae - safety-pin-like brooches - were used by both men and women to hold clothing in place. They were widely used in Britain before the Romans arrived, as well as afterwards, and there are many different styles, although all of them consist of a bowed back and a pin. While being primarily practical they also offered their wearers an opportunity for decoration and display. The complete example of a fibula shown below is made of bronze and was found at Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester).

Thousands of bronze *fibulae* like these have been found in Britain - they must have been an everyday sight. Most styles are 'T' shaped. We can tell from statues that such brooches were worn with the cross-bar of the T facing downwards. The drawing on the right shows how such *fibulae* probably looked in use.



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Cloth and Leather Fragments

The lower layer of the box contains some fragments of a leather shoe and some cloth fragments.

Roman Britain was famous for its cloth products, but no complete item of clothing has survived. The examples in this box probably date from the Roman period, but they were found in Egypt, where the dry conditions are more favourable than they are in Britain to the preservation of cloth.

Cloth was both exported from and imported into Britain. Archaeologists can use a variety of techniques to pinpoint the probable place where fragments of cloth were manufactured. For example, in the western half of the Roman Empire spinners twisted the fibres that made up their thread in a clockwise direction, but in the east they preferred an anti-clockwise direction. However, only very careful examination under a microscope will reveal such clues. Several small fragments of cloth have been found in Britain that are thought to have been made in Egypt.

No doubt much of the clothing that was used in Britain was woven from coarse thread - most of the population probably couldn't afford fine work and the weather favours thick, warm clothing. However, the upper-classes would have been able to afford clothes made from the delicate and colourful threads such as those on display here. There was probably a lot more colour and variety to fashion in Roman Britain than plain tunics and togas!

The leather fragments probably come from a sandal. Leather survives much more readily than cloth in Britain and hundreds of complete and near-complete examples have been preserved. All Roman shoes were flat, without any form of heel, and many were fitted with iron hobnails. These helped give the shoe a longer life and helped give the wearer a grip on rough ground though on a paved surface studded shoes can make the wearer feel unsteady. The holes in these leather fragments may be where hobnails were once fitted.

