

Hands On Learning

with Reading Museum Service

ROMAN COSTUME & JEWELLERY

AH 32/C

Bracelet

Bracelets, of course, long pre-dated the arrival of Romans in Britain. This example is a 'Snake's Head' bracelet. It is made from a thick piece of bronze wire which has been bent into a loop and the two ends flattened. The flattened ends have then been filed and etched to create two simple snake's heads. This kind of bracelet was extremely popular in Roman Britain - many similar ones have been found. More expensive variations were produced in gold and silver, often much more elaborately worked, with finely detailed heads and scales hatched all around the hoop. The most ornate variations have several coils. This example is from the more cut-price end of the market!

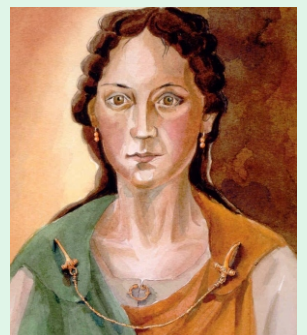


Brooch Fragments

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. The two fragments included here are from different kinds of brooches.

The piece with a bowed back is from one of simplest forms - in effect, little different from a modern safety-pin. The coil of metal at one end acted as a spring, while the flattened bit at the other end would have been bent round along one edge to act as a catch-plate for the pin. The photograph below shows a more complete example of this type - one of the many that were found at Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester). The larger pin could have come from a number of different kinds of brooches. Most styles are 'T' shaped.

While being primarily practical such brooches also offered their wearers an opportunity for decoration and display. 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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Ring

Roman finger rings, like bracelets, have been found in their thousands. However, unlike bracelets, they were a new form of jewellery - few have been found from the period before the Romans. Once introduced, they quickly became very popular and were manufactured in everything from gold to less expensive material such as bone, jet and bronze (like this example).

There were many different kinds of rings. For example, there were several varieties of snake rings - in effect smaller versions of the snake bracelet also found in this box. Many rings were set with a precious stone or have an engraved image, which could be used to seal documents and packages.

This ring has a channel running all around it. At first sight this is a rather uninteresting design, but it may well be intended as a form of betrothal ring. Examples have been found where two rings have been soldered together. Others, like this one, are in fact a single ring, but have been designed to give the impression of two joined rings. The two flattened areas on such a double ring provide surfaces where two names could be engraved.

Roman Shoe

Leather survives much more readily than cloth in Britain and hundreds of complete and near-complete examples of Roman footwear have survived. There were many different kinds of shoe used in Roman Britain and fashions, of course, changed over time. Generally speaking 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.

