



# Dress and Identity in Roman Ewell



## GENDER ASPECTS OF ORNAMENTATION

Ovid (43BC-17/18AD) *On the Painting of the Face*

“Learn, ladies, what care can enhance your appearance, and how your beauty may be preserved.”

Cosmetic grinders are two-piece sets made from copper alloy, comprising a greater component, the mortar and a lesser component, the pestle. Both components have two distinguishing features in common, a crescentic or elliptical shape and, with very few exceptions, a loop for suspension. The mortar has a channelled groove along its inner curve, while the pestle is a solid rod.

### COSMETIC GRINDER

Cosmetic grinders originated in the Late Iron Age but most are from the Roman period and are unique to Britain. The pestle was rocked in the groove of the mortar to crush and grind coloured mineral grits into powdered pigments for eye-shadow, eyeliner and other facial colourings.



1cm

Part of a bovid cosmetic grinder

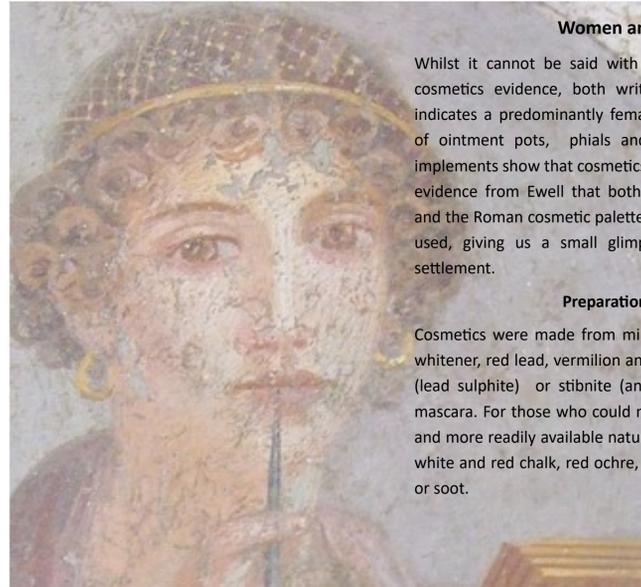
CME14.SF103

This bovid cosmetic grinder was found in Church Meadow (CME2014), and a pestle with a looped end was found during excavations at Nescot (RRE2015) in 2015



1cm

Cosmetic stone palette from Lord Nelson public house site, High Street, Ewell

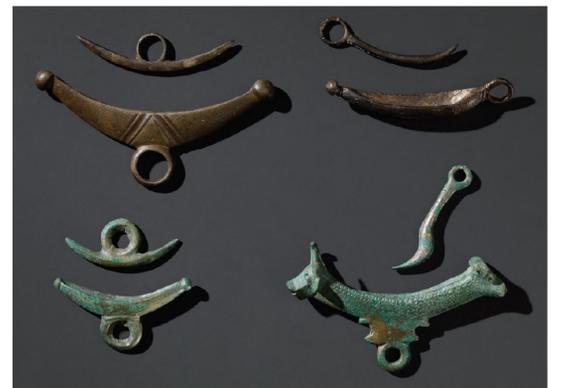


### Women and Cosmetics

Whilst it cannot be said with certainty that only women used cosmetics evidence, both written and from burial deposition, indicates a predominantly female association. Excavated remains of ointment pots, phials and other cosmetic containers and implements show that cosmetics were extensively traded. We have evidence from Ewell that both the British cosmetic grinder sets and the Roman cosmetic palette and toilet implements were being used, giving us a small glimpse into lives of women in the settlement.

### Preparation of cosmetics

Cosmetics were made from minerals such as white lead for face whitener, red lead, vermilion and cinnabar for rouging, and galena (lead sulphite) or stibnite (antimony sulphide) for eye liner or mascara. For those who could not afford imported goods cheaper and more readily available natural materials could be substituted - white and red chalk, red ochre, haematite and powdered charcoal or soot.



Complete cosmetic sets - end-looped, centre-looped and mixed, in the British Museum collection



Examples of elaborate Roman hairstyles

### HAIR PINS

Hairpins are associated with women's hairstyles, being used to keep the hair in place. Pins became popular very rapidly in the 1st century AD, suggesting that hair was worn loose or braided before Romanisation. They also reflect changes in style: the complicated towering fashions of the 1st-2nd c. required long pins, while the simpler styles of the 3-4th c. needed short pins. Bronze and bone are the most common materials for hairpins but it is likely that large numbers were produced in wood, and have not survived so well in the archaeological record.

Pins are found wherever women passed - road surfaces, domestic buildings and public buildings. It is easy for pins to slip out, particularly if they fix buns low at the nape of the neck. Unsurprisingly, large numbers are found in bath houses.



1cm

Bone hair pins from King William IV site, High Street, Ewell

### Hairpins in Ewell

It is unlikely that the majority of women in Ewell would have had elaborate hairstyles. Whilst they would have seen the latest Roman styles on coins (and perhaps on passing wealthy travellers), the styles would have had to have been adapted to suit life in the settlement. The residents of Ewell adopted a Romanised material culture but daily life would have been physically harsh for most women, and simple styles more likely to survive the daily chores; neither would most women have had someone to help put up their hair in an ornate style. Of the 40 or so identified Roman pins found in the Church Meadow excavations (CME12-14) 23 are of copper alloy/bronze, 17 are bone and 1 of jet. Where a pin head was not present there is the chance that the finer pin may be a needle.



1cm

Decorated bone hair pin from King William IV site



Orichalcum sestertius of Lucilla wife of Verus, 164-169  
CME2012

This representation of a 2<sup>nd</sup> century woman shows a hairstyle from Rome that the local women may have been keen to copy



1cm

Decorated bone hair pin from Church Meadow (CME14)



1cm

A type 2 hair pin CME12.SF261

Pins with 1-4 grooves under a conical head 50-200AD



# Dress and Identity in Roman Ewell



## Clothing

The only evidence for what Ewell's Roman residents and travellers passing through were wearing is the fittings that were used to pin their undershirts, tunics, cloaks and coats. Most clothing would have been made at home, with the women of the household spinning and weaving the cloth. There may have been the opportunity, in this roadside settlement, to purchase finer cloth if desired.

Variations in dress are likely not just to represent changes in fashion but to show identification with tribal origins.



1cm

Bronze dress pin  
2nd century AD, KWE1967



1cm

Part of a bone toggle, produced  
on a lathe  
2nd century AD, KWE1967



1cm

Bronze dress pin with a glass bead set in the top  
2nd century AD, KWE1967

### Brooches (fibulae)

Brooches are common finds on Roman sites. They have a largely utilitarian use in that they held clothes together. Whilst their aesthetic quality may have been of secondary consideration there are a wide range of brooch designs. The majority of brooches were made of copper alloys: brasses, bronzes and 'gunmetals' with a number tinned or silvered to give a silvery finish. Enamelling was also used as decoration.

There is little evidence for gender distribution of brooches but pairs of brooches linked by a thread or chain appear to have been exclusively female. It has been suggested that the use of brooches had become less popular by the end of the second century, particularly for women. This suggests that costume had developed and brooches were no longer required. How brooches were worn is also unclear, with some pictorial evidence showing the head of the brooch being worn down. However there is also evidence for brooches being worn horizontally, so personal preference may be a factor.



Large Hod Hill variant brooch In use from c. AD50 up to AD75

CME12.SF132



1cm

Bone toggle KWE67



1cm

Trumpet variant type brooch CME12.SF42



1cm

Brooch from St. Marys Meadow  
SMM1977



1cm

Brooch in the form of a stag running to the right, modelled in flat relief. The antlers are broken but may have joined to form a ring. KWE1967



1cm

Shoe-sole brooch  
North Looe Ewell NLE1946



1cm

Brooch which would have originally been  
enamelled BHL1990



1cm

Brooch from the Lord Nelson public  
house site



1cm

Hinged T-shaped brooch with plain crossbar  
CME12.SF197

Complete Colchester derivative two piece brooch with crossbar CME12.SF208



1cm

Trumpet brooch CME14



1cm

Aucissa brooch from Bourne Hall Lake  
BHL1990



Bow and Fantail Brooch CME14



1cm

Knee brooch CME14



# Dress and Identity in Roman Ewell



## PERSONAL ADORNMENT

Many items of jewellery have been recovered from excavations in Ewell, a small sample of which can be seen below. Apart from brooches, hair pins and dress pins, that have a utilitarian use, jewellery is usually worn as a personal choice. It can enhance one's appearance, indicate one's status or gender, or show one's personal (or family) taste.

Most of the Roman jewellery found in Ewell is based on common-or-garden copper alloy rather than of precious metal and stones. This may be because cheaper jewellery is more abundant, and thus more plentiful in the archaeological record. However an expensive piece of jewellery is more likely to be searched for if lost. Examples of rings and bracelets found in the settlement range from simple twisted strands of metal to more substantial and decorative items – something to suit everyone's tastes.

### Rings

Both men and women wore finger rings as decoration and as a way of carrying seals. They came in various forms - from simple annular strips to the elaborately decorated. In Britain the majority of iron rings are solidly made, of large size and mostly hold intaglios, and are usually considered to have been worn by men.



Small bronze ring from St. Mary's Meadow SMM1977



Metal ring with blue glass intaglio SMM1977



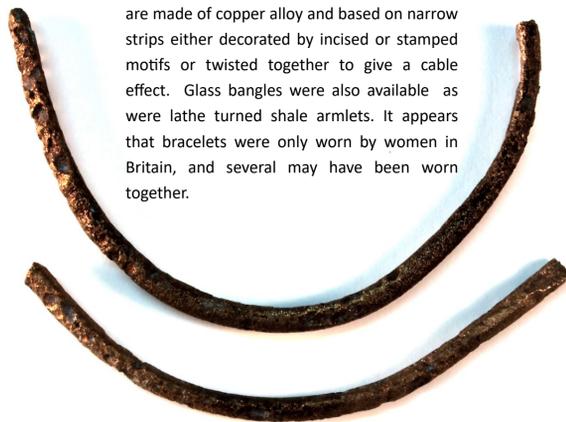
Intaglio of Bonus Eventus, made of glass paste Early 3rd century SMM1977



Ring with a D-section with notched work

### Bracelets

The majority of bracelets found in excavations are made of copper alloy and based on narrow strips either decorated by incised or stamped motifs or twisted together to give a cable effect. Glass bangles were also available as were lathe turned shale armlets. It appears that bracelets were only worn by women in Britain, and several may have been worn together.



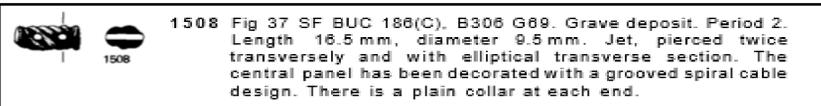
Bronze bracelet or armband NLE1946



Pair of jet bead spacers with a grooved spiral cable design KWE1967



Bracelet from KWE67



Description of jet spacer beads found in Colchester (Crummy: 1983)



Toilet set consisting of a pair of tweezers and a nail cleaner

### Toilet articles

Toilet articles are common finds. They include nail cleaners, tweezers, ear picks (or scoops) and tooth picks, found singly or in sets, and usually made of bronze. Iron and bronze strigils were hollow scrapers used for removing from the skin oil which was applied after bathing. Razors were made of iron or bronze, and combs of wood or bone. Mirrors of polished bronze or silver are known, but mirrors of silvered glass are rare; no mirror has been found in Ewell. Toilet implements may also double up as surgical instruments.



Nail cleaner KWE1967

### Beads

Necklaces were commonly made from beads, particularly of glass, strung on leather thongs, copper alloy wire or fibre string. Beads could also be made from bone, shells, jet, shale, amber, clay, coral, bronze or precious (or semi-precious) stones, or stone.



A gadrooned or 'melon' bead from Church Meadow, CME14



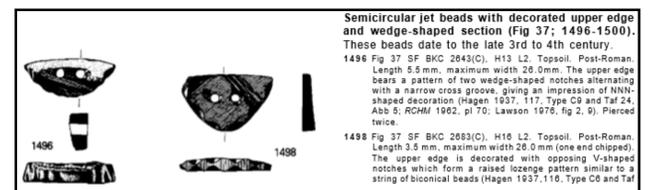
A 'melon' bead from St. Mary's Churchyard, SMC1974



A small blue glass bead found in an environmental sample, CME14



A semi-circular jet bead with a decorated upper edge KWE1967



Description of a similar jet bead from Colchester (Crummy: 1983)



A bone comb found during excavations at the King William IV public house, KWE1967



A glass bead from Purberry Shot PSE 1939

### Glass beads

Three broad groups of glass bead were in use in the Roman period in Britain: Iron Age, Roman and exotic types. The Iron Age types of bead were more garish than the Roman plain monochrome beads which took over in popularity after the middle of the 2nd century. Late Roman beads are very small and numerous and often found in religious contexts.



Example of a string of melon beads