

The Tara Brooch

Have you ever seen a brooch? It's a piece of jewellery that you pin to your blouse or shirt or jacket or jumper. Not many people wear them these days. They seem to have gone out of fashion, which happens a lot with clothes and jewellery.

Take the 'Tara' brooch, for example. It was made in the 700s, and brooches were very much in fashion then. They were quite big in those days, and people used them to fasten cloaks when the weather got a little chilly. This particular brooch was probably worn by a man or woman of great importance.

Even though the 'Tara' brooch is only 9 cm across, it still manages to have 76 different patterns on its surface, including human and animal heads. It is made of a mixture of copper, gold and silver, in a way that was very popular in Germany at the time and contains pieces of coloured glass and fragments of the sticky resin of trees, known as amber.

So all in all, it's a pretty amazing piece of jewellery. But the 'Tara' brooch is also an incredibly useful piece of jewellery because it tells us an enormous amount about people in the 700s. Just by looking at this brooch and playing detective for a little while, we can figure out loads of things.

For a start, those people in the 700s were incredibly skilled and enjoyed making wonderful objects like this. They liked to exaggerate and make things that little bit more fantastic than they actually were. The animals and birds on the 'Tara' brooch, for example, are fabulous, unrealistic, made up kind of creatures, probably copied from other works of art and not from nature. This was a group of people who were interested in what was happening all around them. And that might mean down the road or miles and miles away, or in another country altogether.

The brooch was found on a beach in Tara, County Meath in 1850 and is now held in the National Museum of Ireland.

(Text adapted from [https://www.museum.ie/Archaeology/Exhibitions/Current-Exhibitions/The-Treasury/Gallery-1-Iron-Age-to-12th-Century/Tara-Brooch-\(1\)](https://www.museum.ie/Archaeology/Exhibitions/Current-Exhibitions/The-Treasury/Gallery-1-Iron-Age-to-12th-Century/Tara-Brooch-(1)))