

# Mold Gold Cape

**Made over 3500 years ago. Beautifully made gold object found in North Wales.**

For the men working digging up stones from the local quarry it must have seemed like the old Welsh stories had come true. They'd been sent to work in the field to dig up rocks. The field was in an area called Fairies or Goblins Hill and local people often talked about stories of seeing ghosts wearing gold and shining in the moonlight.

As the workmen dug in to the ground they uncovered a stone-lined grave. They found lots of amber beads, pieces of bronze and some bones from an old skeleton. Wrapped around a skeleton was a strange crushed object - a large and beautifully decorated broken sheet of pure gold.

When people now look at the object they are amazed at how beautiful and mysterious it is. It makes you ask who was it made for? What does it mean? How was it created?

The workmen in the field were excited to find such important and expensive objects in the ground. They shared out pieces of the gold sheet with the farmer taking the largest pieces. The story might have ended there and nobody would have seen the Mold gold cape put together. Luckily, a local churchman called C. B. Clough wrote about the story, and his story was read hundreds of miles away in London.

Three years later the people at the British Museum in London started to buy the pieces of gold. The Cape had been broken into three large and twelve small pieces and it had been crushed flat. It would take another hundred years before the British Museum could get enough of the remaining bits of the Cape (and some bits have never been returned) before they could start to put the pieces together and create the cape as it might have looked at thousands of years ago.

It turned out that the burial space was thousands and thousands of years old, and from the time that we call the Bronze Age. The Cape was originally made around 4000 years ago and had been in the ground for thousands of years. At the British Museum expert staff started to put together the pieces like a big jigsaw puzzle. They had to try and relearn how people many thousand years ago would have worked with the gold to make the object.

It turns out that this object was a cape made of pure gold. It is about 45 cm wide and 30 cm deep. It would have gone over the head and onto the shoulders coming down to about the middle of the chest. The gold is amazingly thin and it might have been made from a piece of gold no larger than a piece of gold the size of a ping-pong ball. The gold was flattened very thin and then punched from the inside to make a beautiful pattern. The people who made it must have been very skilled, just like Tiffany or Cartier jewellers now.

Who could have had so much money to make something like the cape? We used to think that societies back then were really limited and poor, but powerful and rich people must have been around in order to make such a thing. In the same grave they also found Amber beads that must have come from the Baltic coast of Europe, so it looks like people were already travelling long distances to trade with other people.

Another surprise, and unresolved question, is where the gold came from. We don't know what a bronze age gold mine might have looked like, but it must have been a very valuable source of gold in order to make something like the cape. The cape is made with exceptional skill and the person who made it must have designed it very carefully and studied the wearer so that it fitted them

Yet another question is who might have worn such a thing. Judging from the size it was from the worn by a child, but back in the Bronze Age people didn't live much older than 25 years, so maybe everybody was more like a child back then. There would certainly have been very few old people in society.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about it all is the way that an object from so long ago can be discovered and get us thinking about that faraway time.