Pin Encyclopedia Article

Pin

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Pin

The pin has been used since ancient times to fasten pieces of clothing or paper together, and as jewelry. Bronze pins with gold heads have been found in Egyptian tombs. The Greeks and Romans fastened their garments with bronze pins that resembled our modern safety pin. Pins made of wood, bone, and various metals were widely used in medieval Europe. The manufacture of wire pins was well established in France by the late 1500s; England's first large pin factory was established by John Tilsby in 1625 in Gloucester.

In early pin manufacturing, the heads were made separately; attaching and securing them was difficult and produced unreliable results. In 1817 American inventor Seth Hunt patented a machine for making one-piece pins. Similar English machines were designed in 1824 by Samuel Wright and in 1838 by Daniel Foote-Taylor and Henry Shuttleworth. In 1832, American inventor John Ireland Howe patented the first practical and highly effective machine for making one-piece hatpins.

Once the manufacture of one-piece pins was successfully established, packaging the pins efficiently remained problematic. Howe patented a machine in 1843 that solved this problem by inserting pins into sheets of paper. The "paper of pins" soon became a household necessity and continues so to this day.

The modern safety pin was invented in three hours by Walter Hunt (1796-1859), a gifted and prolific New York inventor. Seeking a way to pay off a $15.00 debt, Hunt twisted a piece of brass wire into various shapes until he came up with a coil spring at one end that held the point securely into a clasp at the other end. The problem of being pricked by the sharp end of the pin was eliminated, and so was Hunt's debt: the inventor patented the design and sold the rights to it for $400.00 to his creditor.