

SOME SMALL ROMAN BRONZES IN THE GROSVENOR MUSEUM, CHESTER

by Glenys Lloyd-Morgan, B.A., Ph.D.

Although the collection of Roman bronzes from excavations in the Chester region is not great when compared with finds from other major military and civilian sites in this country, an interesting range of items has been discovered over the years. Small bronzes have had a much better survival rate in general than the larger vessels and other items which are found in a fragmentary and corroded condition. Among the smaller items, enamelled pieces, such as the seal boxes and dress fasteners which are catalogued below, have survived better, not only because the enamel has to some extent protected the metal, but also because they have attracted the eye of the antiquarian and excavator alike. Although such enamelled objects as studs and fibulas have been omitted here, the range of simple designs and enamel colours demonstrated by these two groups is typical of the region. Some of these pieces could have been manufactured locally. Wilderspool as suggested by Thomas May (1904, 71-8), could have been one centre of production, though crucibles and other evidence for bronze working have also been found in Chester, Heronbridge and Holt (Hartley, 1954, 12-14, gives a useful but incomplete checklist of sites). However, with such a small number of items, even taking into account the pieces from recent excavations which are not listed below, it would be unwise to attribute specific items to various workshops when the sites have only been partially or inadequately excavated and studied. This brief catalogue is therefore offered as a survey of the present holdings of the Museum, in the hope that it will be of use to students and excavators in this region.

Dress Fasteners

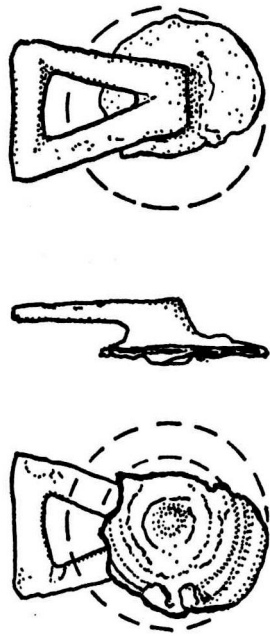
In 1970 J. P. Wild published a survey of dress fasteners in the Roman provinces, and in the appendix listed two examples in the Museum from excavations in Chester (Wild, 1970, no. 53, p. 150; and no. 63, p. 151). One of the entries was not quite correct and further investigation revealed a number of unpublished and previously unrecognised pieces.

Wild's classification has been followed throughout in the catalogue below.

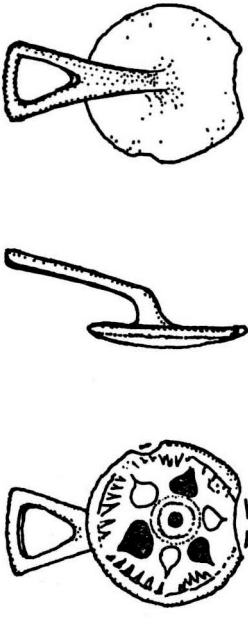
CATALOGUE

Wild Class Va

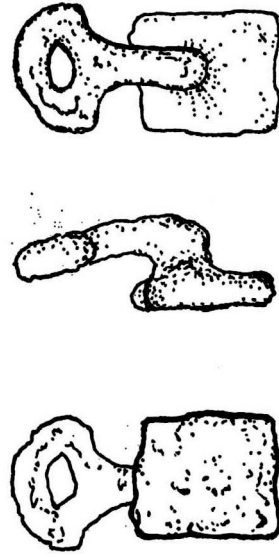
- 1 Circular head with notched edge. Diam. 2.7cm.
Triangular loop.



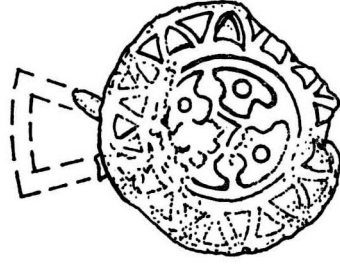
(a) 30. R. 1977 H/B



(b) 31. R. 1977 H/B 1959



(c) 554. R. 1976 NEWGATE ST. 1955



(d) 555. R. 1976 W. J. WILLIAMS COLLECTION

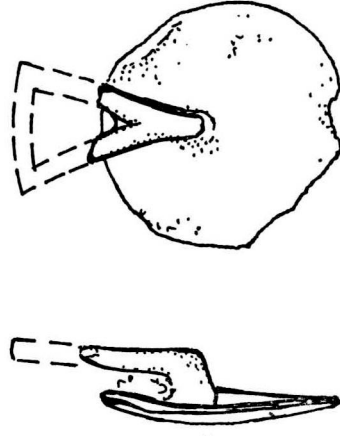


Fig. 1 — Dress fasteners from Chester and Heronbridge

Total length 3.5cm.

Amphitheatre, Chester, 1930, arena gutter, site 5.

Found with late first century pottery.

Acc. no. 451. R. 1930 (on display).

Newstead and Droop, 1932, 35, pl. XI, no. 5.

Wild, 1970, no. 53, p. 150.

- 2 Concentric moulded circles on head. Diam. 1.9cm.

Triangular loop.

Total length 3.0cm.

Amphitheatre, Chester, 1960, from post medieval sandstone drain.

Acc. no. 233. R. 1976.

Thompson, 1976, 190, no. 6, fig. 25.

- 3 Concentric moulded circles on head, badly worn. Diam. about 2.8cm.

Triangular loop.

Total length about 3.6cm.

Heronbridge, Chester.

Acc. no. 30. R. 1977 (fig. 1a).

Unpublished.

Wild Class Vb

- 4 Head inlaid with blue and orange enamel. Diam. 2.1cm.

Triangular loop.

Length 3.4cm.

Heronbridge, Chester, 1959, 'found on cobbled surface'.

Acc. no. 31. R. 1977 (fig. 1b).

Unpublished.

- 5 Elaborately decorated head, inlaid with blue enamel in the central area and white enamel in the outer band. Diam. 3.4cm.

Broken triangular loop.

Total length about 3.7cm.

Ex collection W. J. Williams, Chester, from Chester area.

Acc. no. 555. R. 1976 (fig. 1d).

Wild Class VIb

- 6 Heavily corroded plain head: 2.0 × 1.8cm.

Broken across shaft, semi circular loop.

Total length 3.4cm.

Newgate St., Chester, 1955.

Acc. no. 554. R. 1976 (fig. 1c).

Not in excavation report.

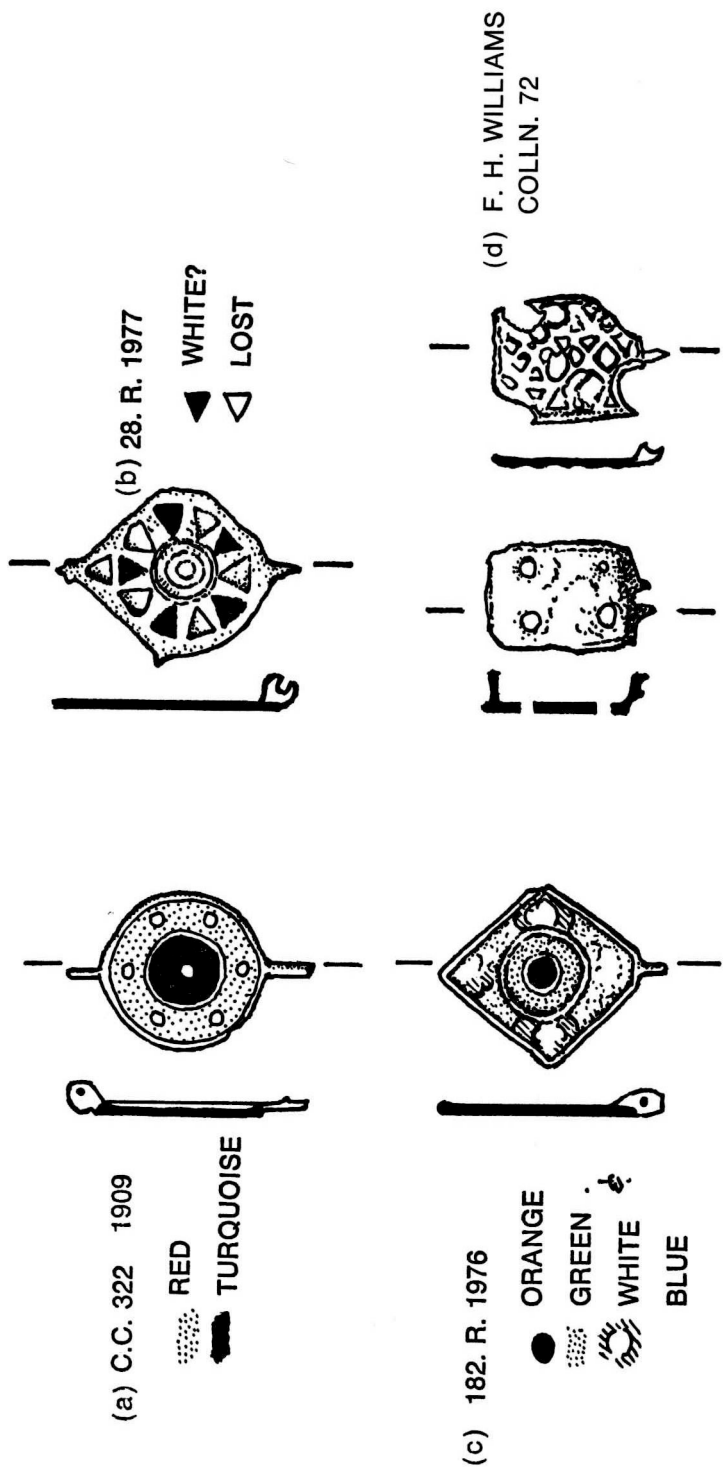


Fig. 2 — Enamelled seal boxes from Chester

Other Examples

- 7 Very worn plain head: 1.5 × 1.15cm.
 Triangular loop.
 Total length 2.85cm.
 Ex Collection Charles Potter, Meols, Wirral.
 Acc. no. 392. R. 1976.
 Unpublished. Wild Class Vc or Vlb.
- 8 Bronze head with punch decoration and tinned panels. Diam. 2.6cm.
 Loop trimmed down to a stump with a square cross section.
 Deanery Field, Chester, 1928, 'Barrack block, room 16, from Antonine deposit'.
 Unnumbered.
 Droop and Newstead, 1931, 133, no. 20, pl. XLVI.
 Wild, 1970, no. 63, p. 151, where it is incorrectly described as enamelled, perhaps in confusion with a stud shown on pl. XLVI, no. 26, and on display in close proximity to the fastener.
- 9 Circular head with concentric circles and traces of enamel? Diam. 2.2cm.
 Shaft trimmed down to stump with square cross section, but at a characteristic angle to the head.
 Deanery Field, Chester, 1922-23.
 Acc. no. 32. R. 1977.
 Newstead, 1924, 80, no. 1, pl. VI, where it is described as a stud.
 Wild class Vb?

Seal Boxes

One of the more unusual misidentifications of Roman items in the past has been the seal box. Thomas May, noting a nearly complete diamond shaped example from Wilderspool, describes it as 'a locket or sachet for containing scents or amulets' (1904, 80, fig. 1 on p. 79). This attractive suggestion also occurs in the manuscript catalogue of the collection of antiquities given to the Chester Archaeological Society by Frank H. Williams in 1900. The piece, no. 11 in the catalogue below, is described as 'no doubt the little scent casket of some Roman lady, and the four holes in its under surface formed to allow the escape of perfume'.

A seal box from excavations at Wroxeter in 1914, complete with wax seal and traces of the cord, demonstrates how the boxes were used to protect the wax sealing a package, or documents (Bushe-Fox, 1916, 27-9, no. 25, pls. XVIII, XIX; *see also* British Museum, 1922, 95-6, figs. 117, 118). So far, no examples have been found with a small animal in high relief on the lid, like the one found, for instance, at Wroxeter (Bushe-Fox, 1916, no. 27, pl. XVIII), and Richborough. Several fine examples with enamel inlay are reported from recent unpublished excavations in Chester, and the list below represents a complete catalogue of the Museum collections to date.

CATALOGUE

Circular Form

- 1 Complete example, diam. 2.2cm, length with hinge 3.35cm.
The lid is inlaid with red and white enamel in the outer ring and with red in the centre.
The base is perforated with five holes.
On display in the Newstead Gallery (Dec. 1977) but no records relating to find spot, etc., have been located.
- 2 Lid only, diam. 2.1cm, length with hinge and catch 3.3cm.
The outer ring of enamel is red, the centre turquoise or blue.
Ex collection Frank Simpson, from the foundations dug for the Masonic Hall, Hunter St., Chester, 12 June 1909.
Acc. no. CC322. 1909 (fig. 2a).
Newstead, 1948, 146-7, fig. 33, where it is described as a disc brooch.
- 3 Base only, diam. 1.7-1.9cm, depth 0.4cm.
Rather worn condition, four perforations in base.
Deanery Field, Chester, 1928, 'found under cement floor of room 18'.
Acc. no. 27. R. 1977.
Droop and Newstead, 1931, 137, no. 99, pl. XLVIII, where it is illustrated as part of a ?lock plate.
- 4 Base only, diam. 1.9cm, depth 0.6cm.
Hinge almost complete, three perforations in base.
Western defences between Linenhall St. and Trinity St., Chester, 1949, from Pit 2, with coin of Vespasian.
Acc. no. 183. R. 1976.
Webster, 1953, 8, fig. 5, no. 2.
- 5 Base only, diam. 1.8cm, depth 0.46cm.
Slightly cracked, hinge rather corroded, four perforations in base.
Amphitheatre, Chester, 1968, Pit F4.
Acc. no. 234. R. 1976.
Thompson, 1976, 190, fig. 25, no. 7.

'Tear Drop' Form

- 6 Lid only, length 2.7 × 2.0cm.
Hinge missing, outer ring inlaid with damaged red, white and ?blue panels of enamel and the inner ring with orange/red enamel.
Linenhall St., Chester, June 1945, from 'the dark soil over west lip of Roman Ditch'.
Acc. no. CC335. 1945.
Unpublished.

7 Lid only, length 3.16 × 2.2cm.

Edge slightly damaged, inlaid with an outer ring of triangular panels of alternating ?white and another colour of enamel, now lost.

Grosvenor St./Castle Esplanade, Chester, 29 April 1964, pipe trench.

Acc. no. 28. R. 1977 (fig. 2b).

Unpublished.

8 Lid only.

Inlaid with a narrow heart shaped band of blue enamel.

City Road/Foregate St., Chester 1970, found during work on the Inner Ring Road.

Acc. no. 81. R. 1971.

Unpublished.

Diamond or Lozenge Form

9 Lid only, length 3.0 × 2.3cm.

Outer area inlaid with blue and white enamel, with inside this, a ring of green enamel above a small circular field of orange enamel.

Deanery Field, Chester, 1922-3, 'site I, late deposit N.E. of paved footway'.

Acc. no. 182. R. 1976 (fig. 2c).

Newstead, 1924, 80, no. 2, pl. VI.

10 Base only, length about 3.4cm, depth 0.35cm.

Incomplete and corroded. Three perforations in base.

Ex collection W. J. Williams, Chester, from Chester area.

Acc. no. 29. R. 1977.

Rectangular Form

11 Almost complete. Lid 2.4 × 1.7cm, depth 0.5cm.

Base 2.2 × 1.5cm, depth 0.6cm.

Both pieces have been cleaned recently and much of the hinge and parts of the sides of each section have been lost.

The lid is inlaid with red, orange and ?white enamel in a reticular pattern.

The base has four perforations.

'Site of the "Old Brewers Arms" and the adjoining shop on the west, on the north side of Foregate St., Chester, 1897' (nos. 61 and 63 Foregate St.).

Ex Collection F. H. Williams, manuscript catalogue no. 72 (fig. 2d).

Note

A preliminary survey, 'Some little known bronzes from Roman Chester', was given at the IV Colloque International sur les Bronzes Antiques, Lyon 17-20 May 1976, which is to be published as part of the *Actes* in the *Annales de l'Université Jean Moulin, Lyon*. The drawings used here were most kindly prepared by Mr. P. Alebon, the Museum draughtsman. This note is dedicated to Drs. Marjan Galestin of Leiden, a fellow student of bronzes.

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