

Small Finds of South Shields Roman Fort Notes

No. 6: lead sealings

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Version 1: 2020

The early excavations and chance finds produced 37 Roman lead sealings (eg Allason-Jones and Milet 1984, nos 8.1-2 8.4-28, 8.34, 8.36-7), 35 of which are either extant or known from casts, and two which are now missing. The 1983-2016 excavations have produced a further 21 examples, which are not included here. The first five or six examples were found in 1877, after the end of the formal excavations inside the fort. There was later 'prospecting' over the site, both inside and outside of the fort walls, with any finds sold to local collectors such as Robert Blair, including the 18 now in the Great North Museum: Hancock. Hooppell mentions some were found in the area of the later Edith Street, one section of which was built over the northern part of the fort (1878a, 44; pl. XIII), but the exact finds-spots are otherwise unknown. Hooppell said that his list of six were all that had been found up to that time (*ibid.*, 38). In 1885 Bruce published 12 examples, although he does mention that a 'large number' had been found and so may have simply ignored the more corroded examples (1885, 254-5).

The purpose of this note is to illustrate all the sealings found before 1984 in colour, although sometimes casts (made by Blair) have been used where they provide better detail. The photographs are not to scale. Where possible a concordance has been made with previous publications of the sealings, although it proved difficult to identify all those listed in Richmond 1934, which were recorded with only very basic descriptions without illustrations.

Key to colours used in Table 1

	found by 1877
	found by 1878
	found in 1879
	found in 1880
	found by 1882
	found by 1885

Table 1: List of the Roman sealings and publications. The colour coding relates to when the sealings were found.

AJ&M¹ or other no	description	Date discovered	Blair 1957	Watkin 1878	Hooppell 1878a	Blair 1880²	Hooppell 1878b³	Bruce 1885	Rich- mond 1934	D&G⁴ 1979
				5 eggs	6 eggs	6 eggs	8 eggs	12 eggs	30 eggs	40 eggs
8.1	Alexander							no. 5	no. 26	no. 19
8.2	Venus							no. 4	no. 28	no. 18
8.4	Hippocampus								no. 29	
8.5	Head on both sides		75		no. 6	no. 4		no. 6		no. 20
8.6	Standing figure?	29 Sept 1878	108							
8.7	Imperial								no. 9	
8.8	Imperial								no. 2?	
8.9	Imperial							no. 1		no. 1
8.10	Imperial									
8.11	Imperial									
8.12	Imperial									
8.13	Imperial									
8.14	Imperial								no. 24?	
8.15	Imperial	10 Apr 1880								
8.16	Imperial	27 Dec 1877	31, 100	no. 4	no. 4	no. 3	no. 4	no. 7	no. 1?	no. 8
8.17	Imperial	4 Aug 1880							no. 4	no. 2
8.18	Imperial	11 June 1879								
8.19	Imperial							no. 3		no. 9
8.20	Imperial								no. 6	no. 6
8.21	Imperial									

¹ AJ&M = Allason-Jones and Milet 1984.

² Based on a paper read in May 1877: see Bruce 1885, 253.

³ Based on a paper read in May 1878.

⁴ D&G = Dore and Gillam 1979.

AJ&M¹ or other no	description	Date discovered	Blair 1957	Watkin 1878	Hooppell 1878a	Blair 1880²	Hooppell 1878b³	Bruce 1885	Rich- mond 1934	D&G⁴ 1979
8.22	CVG with bird								no. 16	no. 12
8.23	CVG/NEM*F							no. 11	no. 17	no. 14
8.24	ASA	Mar/Apr 1877	75, 100	no. 1	no. 2	no. 5	no. 2	no. 10	no. 19	no. 16
8.25	CVG / FL*	23 Nov 1877	100	no. 5		no. 6		no. 9	no. 18	no. 13
8.26	LVI									no. 10
8.27	LVI/OVA		75, 100	no. 2	no. 1	no. 1	no. 1	no. 8	no. 23	no. 11
8.28	PAV	Sept 1880	75					no. 2	no. 25	no. 17
8.29	Cloth seal								no. 22	
8.30	Cloth seal								no. 30	
8.37	CVG/ [..]D								no. 20	no. 28
<i>RIB</i> 2411.10	Imperial									
<i>RIB</i> 2411.16	Imperial	by 1882								
<i>RIB</i> 2411.103	CVG/[..]M		75, 100	no. 3	no. 3	no. 2	no. 3	no. 12		
-	Imperial (lost)				no. 5					
-	Imperial (unidentified, but in listings above)						nos 5 – 7			nos 3-5, 7, 30-7
	others (unidentified)									nos 15, 21- 6, 27, 29, 38-40
-	unclear						no. 8			

Manufacture

Where identifiable, the string hole usually runs vertically.

Imperial

The body is thin and there is a pierced bump on the back for the string, sometimes roughly conical and sometimes neatly circular or rectangular. The hole is often larger than on the other types of sealings, and it is possible these sealings were pre-cast and were only later threaded onto the string. Some have wood-grain impressions on the back, either from a block of wood used as a former (if the sealings were pre-cast), or from a piece of wood temporarily placed under the string to protect the object being sealed from being burnt by the hot lead. There is an impression on the front only.



Characteristic thin body, large hole prominent bump on the back (TWCMS : T2717)

Military

Most are two-sided. The lead poured was into a rectangular or circular mould with the unit name cut into in the bottom. The lead overflowed the top and so is larger and often more irregular in shape. The upper face usually has a second seal impression, often belonging to an individual. Presumably the sealings were attached to the object being sealed in such a way that both sides were visible.



Rectangular mould with irregular, and larger, overflow (TWCMS : T2710)



From left: the lower, smaller, face with unit name; side view showing mould with a 'muffin top' overflow with rounded edges; top view with wide overflow with rounded edges visible round the impression (NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(15))

Personal

The examples from the fort are one-sided, with a rounded back. The impression comes from an intaglio.



Typical rounded back (NEWMA : 1956.128.13.A(17))

Other

The rectangular sealing marked PAV (TWCMS : T2712) was cast into a roughly rectangular depression and has overflow at the top (as with the military examples). However, the rectangular shape is irregular, slightly rounded and had no legend carved into it, and there is an impression on one side of the sealing only (like the civilian examples).



Rectangular base with a rough surface and a wider top (TWCMS : T2712)

Imperial sealings

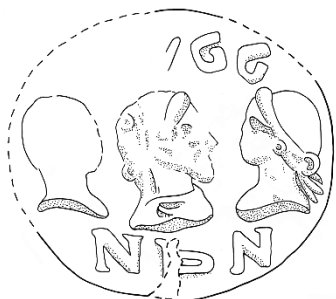
Three different dies can be recognised. All were approximately 22mm across, although Die 2 was probably more circular than the others (drawings are at 2:1).

Die 1



This is the most common die; even on poor impressions the long thin necks are distinctive. Severus, in the centre, faces Caracalla; Geta is to the right, placed very close to Severus. Other distinguishing elements are Severus' diadem with open circles, the two Z shapes beneath the busts, and the triangular A in the legend. The drapery is well defined at the front while the folds behind the neck are only lightly moulded. Some impressions show the seal had a bevelled edge (eg. NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(4) / AJ&M 8.16)

Die 2



Die 2 has a different legend. Severus faces right and both he and his son have smooth wreaths. There are only two examples of sealings with this die, both incomplete (one in this collection, and one from the 1983-2016 excavations).

Die 3



This die has a laurel wreath round the edge. There are only two examples, both incomplete. The design has been reconstructed from the fragmentary TWCMS : T2716, a drawing (in *RIB*) of when it was more complete, and the corroded and incomplete TWCMS : T2746. The one bust surviving in reasonable condition shows that the modelling was originally very fine, and of higher quality than Die 1. The left-hand bust has a distinctive long straight nose.

Personal

There are two of interest:

AJ&M 8.2: Venus

Her pose and nakedness identify this figure as Venus (Henig 2007, no. 808), but the objects around her are unclear. Behind her is a large palm leaf or ear of wheat, the lower part damaged. Between her head and out-stretched arm is an ivy-leaf shaped object. Crossing her arm, rather than held in her hand, is a bent rod, ending in something like a flower (with bent petals) rather than a star (with straight rays). It is possible the 'rod' is damage to the intaglio, but most damage to intaglios consists of chips rather than deep gouges. Venus was a comparatively popular subject for intaglios, and Marshman lists 21 examples depicting Venus by herself, half of which were of Venus Victrix with weapons (particularly popular on military sites: Marshman 2015, 153; appendix 4, nos 26.00-21). The pose depicted on this example, however, is not known on any other intaglios from Britain.

AJ&M 8.4: Hippocamp

The intaglio depicts a hippocamp with a dolphin below. The only other British example of an intaglio with both these creatures comes from London (Murdoch 1991, 82, pl. 14, no. 62), which has a different orientation and a trident behind the dolphin to indicate the animals are part of Neptune's retinue. The intaglio was perhaps chosen by some-one who made or organised voyages by sea, especially as the dolphin was also associated with saving lives, but the image may have a more funerary symbolism, representing the voyage across the ocean to the Isle of the Blessed in the afterlife (Marshmann 2015, 118).

Abbreviations

AJ&M	Allason-Jones and Miket 1984
D&G	Dore and Gillam 1979
NEWMA	artefacts in the collection of the Great North Museum: Hancock
<i>RIB</i>	Collingwood and Wright 1990
TWCMS	artefacts in the collection of Arbeia South Shields Roman Fort

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Watkin, W. T., 1878 'Britanno-Roman inscriptions discovered in 1877', *Archaeological Journal* **35**, 63-79

Illustrations start on following page

Table 2: Lead sealings from South Shields Roman Fort (1876-1981)

Upper surface	Lower surface, extra images or other views	Comments
Published in Allason-Jones and Miket 1984		
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.1</p> <p>Bruce 1885: no. 5 Richmond 1934: no. 26</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2714</p> <p>Comments: this sealing is unusual in having the string hole running horizontally</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.2</p> <p>Bruce 1885: no. 4 Richmond 1934: no. 28</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2715</p>



Allason-Jones and Miket 8.3

Accession no: TWCMS : T2703

This is a modern lead impression of one of the intaglios from the site

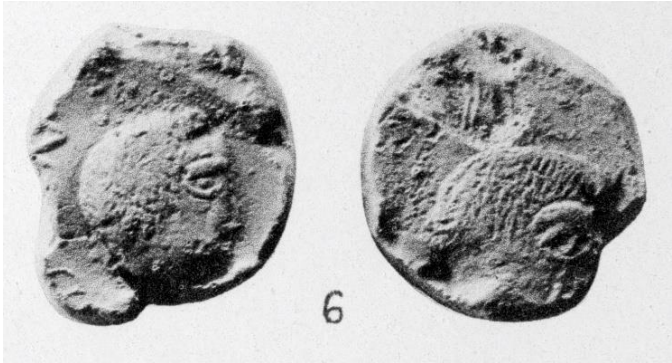





Allason-Jones and Miket 8.4



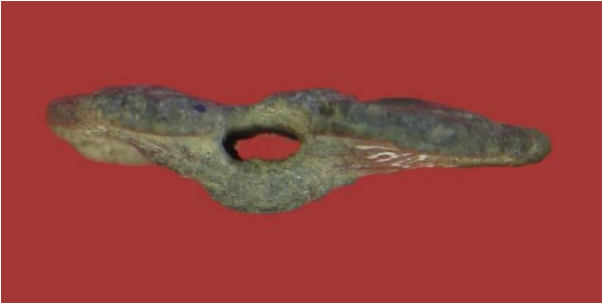
Richmond 1934: no. 29



Accession no: TWCMS : T2713



 <p>from Bruce 1885</p>	 <p>cast</p>	<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.5</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.24</p> <p>Bruce 1885: no. 6</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.116.A(17)</p> <p>Comments: this is described as having a head on both sides, which would be unusual on a sealing</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.6</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.13.A(17)</p>

		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.7</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.9</p> <p>Richmond 1934: no. 9</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2716</p> <p>Comments: Die 3</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.8 (accession details wrong in entry; both photograph and <i>RIB</i> locate this in NEWMA collection)</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.2</p> <p>Richmond 1934: no. 2?</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A</p> <p>Comments: Die 1</p>

		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.9</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.8</p> <p>Bruce 1885: no. 1</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2711</p> <p>Comments: Die 1</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.10</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.11</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2717</p> <p>Comments: Die 1</p>

		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.11</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.12</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2718</p> <p>Comments : Die 1</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.12</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.13</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2719</p> <p>Comments: the spacing of the heads, long necks and Z-shapes suggest this is Die 1, although there is an unusual line down the back of Severus' head</p>

		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.13</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.14</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2720</p> <p>Comments: Die 1</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.14</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.15</p> <p>Richmond 1934: no. 24?</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2746</p> <p>Comments: Die 3</p>

		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.15</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.6</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(3)</p> <p>Comments: Die 1</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.16</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.1</p> <p>Blair 1880: no. 3 Bruce 1885: no. 7 Richmond 1934: no. 1?</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(4)</p> <p>Comments: Die 1</p>

	 	<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.17</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.3</p> <p>Richmond 1934: no. 4</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.15.A(5)</p> <p>Comments : Die 1</p>
	 	<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.18</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.5</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(10)</p> <p>Comments: Die 1</p>



cast

Allason-Jones and Miket 8.19

RIB: 2411.7

Bruce 1885: no. 3

Accession no:
NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(9)

Comments: Die 2



Allason-Jones and Miket 8.20

RIB: 2411.4

Richmond 1934: no. 6

Accession no:
NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(13)

Comments: probably Die 1

		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.21</p> <p>Accession number: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(14)</p> <p>Comments: not located</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.22</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.100</p> <p>Richmond 1934: no. 16</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(16)</p>



cast



Allason-Jones and Miket 8.23

RIB: 2411.104

Bruce 1885: no. 11
Richmond 1934: no. 17

Accession no:
NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(15)



cast



Allason-Jones and Miket 8.24

RIB: 2411.86



Watkin 1877, 140
Watkin 1878: no. 1
Hooppell 1878a: no. 2
Blair 1880: no. 5
Bruce 1885: no. 10
Richmond 1934: no. 19

Accession no:
NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(12)

		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.25</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.102</p> <p>Blair 1880: no. 6 Bruce 1885: no. 9 Richmond 1934: no. 18</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(11)</p>
 		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.26</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.68</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(6)</p> <p>Comments: the upper surface does not have an impression, but rather a caved surface from solidification shrinkage</p>

 <p>cast</p>		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.27</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.70</p> <p>Blair 1880: no. 1 Bruce 1885: no. 8 Richmond 1934: no. 23</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2710</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.28</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.296</p> <p>Bruce 1885: no. 2 Richmond 1934: no. 25</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2712</p>

			<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.29</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.101</p> <p>Richmond 1934: no. 22</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2704</p> <p>Comments: this is a post-medieval cloth seal, reading 'C[.]' and 'NP' and an L-shaped symbol(?) on the back</p>
			<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.30</p> <p>Richmond 1934: no. 30</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2705</p> <p>Comments: this is a post-medieval cloth seal, with no visible impression</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.31</p> <p>Not a sealing</p>	
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.32</p> <p>Not a sealing</p>	

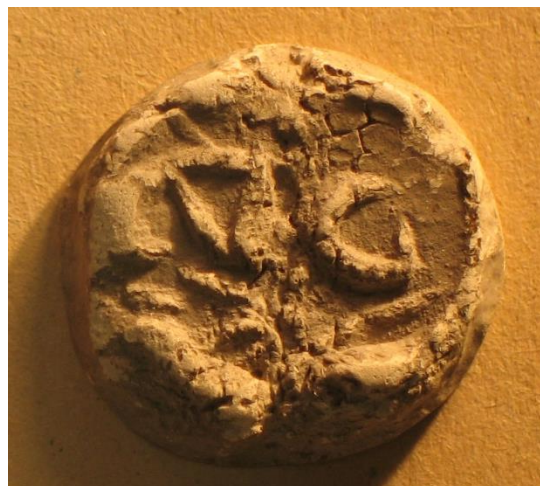
		Allason-Jones and Miket 8.33 Not a sealing
		Allason-Jones and Miket 8.34 Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(1)
		Allason-Jones and Miket 8.35 Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(2) Comments: a circular casting, but not a sealing as there is no string hole and no visible impressions

		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.36</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(7)</p> <p>Comments: the raised bump on the back identifies this as an Imperial three-bust sealing</p>
		<p>Allason-Jones and Miket 8.37</p> <p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.105</p> <p>Richmond 1934: no. 20</p> <p>Accession no: NEWMA : 1956.128.15.A(8)</p>

		<p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.10</p> <p>Accession no: TWCMS : T2709 (the number visible on the back of the seal is a previous accession number)</p> <p>Comments: Die 1</p>
 <p>from RIB</p>		<p><i>RIB</i>: 2411.16</p> <p>Accession no: British Museum 1882,0830.2</p> <p>Comments: Die 1</p>
<p>Imperial three bust sealing</p>		<p>Hooppell 1878a: no. 5</p> <p>Lost before 1878 (<i>ibid.</i>, 39)</p>



from Bruce 1885



cast

RIB: 2411.103

Hooppell 1878a: no. 3

Blair 1880: no. 2

Bruce 1885: no. 12

Location unknown