

A Roman terra-cotta head and a bronze weight from Newstead, Roxburghshire

by J Walter Elliot

Terra-cotta head

With permission of the owner, Major-General Younger, and in consultation with his farm manager, Mr Scott, the writer has the privilege of walking over and searching the ploughed fields on the site of the Roman camp at Newstead. The purpose of the search is to recover objects of archaeological interest which have been turned to the surface by the plough and which could subsequently be destroyed by further agricultural activity. In the course of many years, a quite remarkable collection of Roman objects has been saved for posterity. Since field-hunting is a continuing process, it has been noted over the years that certain parts of the camp and more especially its annexes, are more fruitful than others. At Newstead, two places are particularly rich.

Six years ago, a field to the E of the Main Camp, which had been in permanent grass, was ploughed and a dark patch was noted in the soil. This patch measured approximately 40 m by 20 m and proved very rich in Roman finds - 14 beads (or parts), 7 playing men, 1 paste intaglio, etc, in the first year. It could be deduced that this was the site of an important building, probably a second baths, when the main camp was divided between legionaries and cavalry. This, however, must await excavation to prove the point.

Almost at the same time, it was noted that, in a much smaller area in the S annexe, the plough had bitten slightly deeper into the earth and that the bottom of the upturned furrows showed a dark 'occupation layer', 5 cm thick, which contained charcoal and fresh-looking Roman pottery. As this area had been previously recognised as a good findspot, extra care was taken in searching there. This was amply repaid when, on 30 November 1974, a terra-cotta head of Minerva was found (fig 1).

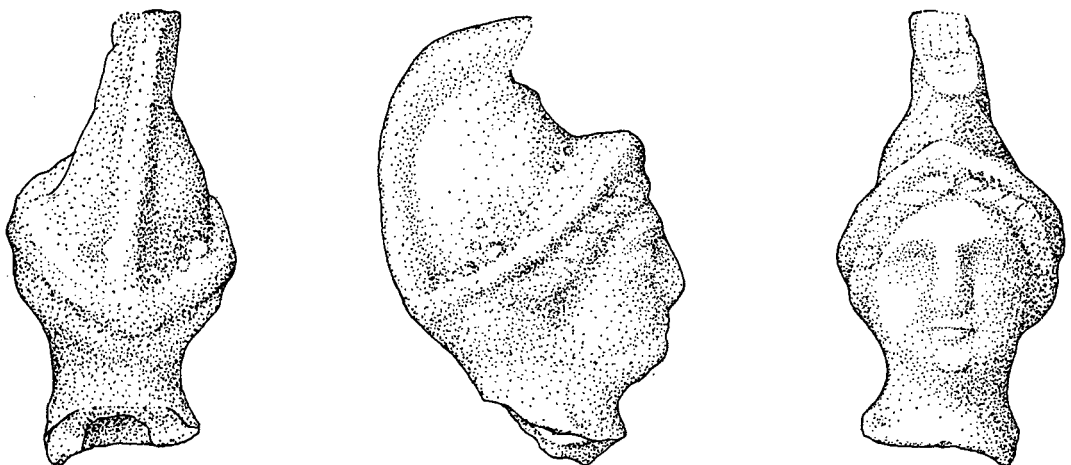


FIG 1 Terra-cotta head of Minerva, Newstead (scale 1 : 1)

Roman terra-cotta is scarce in Scotland – only three objects being previously known. These are a pair of horses yoked together from Newstead (Curle 1911, 305, pl 73), a boar from Birrenswark¹ and a miniature bale of skins or cloth from the broch of Dun an Iardhard in the Isle of Skye (Curle 1932, 289, 349, 395). Although the miniature bale is possibly a votive offering to ensure a profitable trading trip, the Minerva head from Newstead is the first Roman terra-cotta deity to appear in a Scottish context.

The head is made from a light grey clay which has slight tones of orange. It has been broken from the body at the base of the neck. The features have survived intact but are scorched on the right side of the face. The hair is braided and shows below the helmet, which is Attic and single crested. Two small lumps that may represent rivets show on the helmet behind the right ear and there is the suggestion of another at the base of the crest. The crest has a small chip missing from the front and a larger one on one side of the upper back ridge. Certain parts of the face and helmet have been smoothed in antiquity but others still show the small bumps of the original casting. The head measures 6 cm in height, 3 cm in width at the rim of the helmet, and 3 cm in depth from the nose to the back of the helmet.

Minerva, as the goddess of war and also of wisdom, would be a most suitable deity for a Roman soldier and especially for an officer. One of the *Dii Majorum Gentium*, she would be thought to be a powerful protectress. The Newstead head has none of the softer and rounder features of other terra-cotta Minervas found in Britain.² Adam's words describe the Newstead head perfectly: 'represented as an armed virgin, beautiful but stern and dark coloured with azure or sky-coloured eyes' (Adam 1833, 222).

Terra-cotta statuettes were known to have been made in flourishing *officinae* throughout most of the 2nd century AD. These were centred on the Cologne area and in Central Gaul. Since it is known that many of the garrison at Newstead were drawn from the German frontier, it would be easy to suppose that the Minerva head came from one of the Rhenish sources. (Seated Minervas are thought to be of Rhine-Mosel manufacture.) However, this easy supposition may not be the case. At Trier, the local grey clay was used and, when fired, gives a distinctive orange surface. This surface was often given a drab white slip coating which in most cases vanished through burial.³ The Newstead head exhibits these characteristics although it must also be noted that the scorch marks on the right side of the face may have changed slightly the surface colouring. Only by spectrographic examination could the source of manufacture be determined.

Bronze weight

On 17 April 1976, while surface hunting on the site of the Main Camp at Newstead, I was fortunate enough to pick up a bronze weight with a lion's head cast in deep relief. It was found in the NW corner of where the *Principia* stood. The weight is cast bronze and has an irregularly rounded base; the top has a most realistically styled lion's head in deep relief. Diameter of base, 34 mm; height, 24 mm (fig 2). The excellent workmanship on the object gives the indication of a

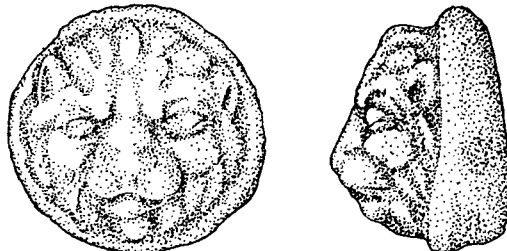


FIG 2 Bronze weight, Newstead (scale 1 : 1)

'special' use. It is unlikely to have been a furniture inlay boss for two reasons – it is too heavy and it has no tang or symmetrical back to ease fitting. The irregularly rounded base would make glueing practically impossible.

Had the object been a standard weight, it might be expected to compare with other weights from the site. However, there is a considerable variance in the weights from Newstead as the following list shows:

1	Lead	24.5 gm (Curle 1911, 309)
2	Lead	54.5 gm (W D Mason – surface find)
3	Lead	66.1 gm (W D Mason – surface find)
4	BRONZE LION HEAD	92.0 gm (J W Elliot – surface find)
5	Lead	124.7 gm (Curle 1911, 309)
6	Lead	130.4 gm (Curle 1911, 309)
7	Lead	155.7 gm (J W Elliot – surface find)
8	Lead	159.3 gm (J W Elliot – surface find)

Since the object was found in the Principia, the home of the funds and paymaster, there exists the possibility that it may have been a coin weight or had some similar use.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My most sincere thanks are due to Professor Jocelyn M C Toynbee and Mr Frank Jenkins for their information and interest and to Miss Helen Jackson for the drawing of the terracotta head. I am obliged to Mr W D Mason, Selkirk, for permission to publish his weights.

NOTES

- 1 Presented to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland by the Rev J Jaffray in 1851. NMAS cat no. FR 182.
- 2 e.g. Minerva figurine found at Caerwent, Monmouthshire, and now in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.
- 3 Information kindly supplied by Mr Frank Jenkins.

REFERENCES

- Adam, A 1833 *Roman Antiquities, an Account of the Manners and Customs of the Romans*. London.
 Curle, J 1911 *A Roman Frontier Post and its People*. Glasgow.
 Curle, J 1932 'An Index of Objects of Roman and Provincial Roman origin found on Sites in Scotland not definitely associated with Roman Constructions', *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 66 (1931-2), 277-400.