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History of ophthalmology

Do you have a Roman connection?

The Romans occupied Britain from AD 43 to around AD 410. Ophthalmic care was available from itinerant oculists who usually prescribed eye salves (collyria) or drops which were made from a block that was diluted with a fluid such as egg. The solid blocks were often stamped with details of the medicament and the name of the oculist. Some 300 stamps have been found in the Roman empire with 30 of these in Britain (see table).¹ There are 20 modern day eye departments near to where finds have been made. Probably the most closely located is Moorfields Eye Hospital. A cup with an

oculist's inscription by Lucius Iulius Senex for a saffron eye salve was found at nearby Moorgate Street in 1929. Single finds have been made in Wales, Scotland, and southern Ireland. Four of the stamps have been unearthed over the past 25 years. Perhaps there is one lying undiscovered near your hospital.

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¹ Collingwood RG, Wright RP. *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*. Volume II. Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishers, 1992: 43-62.

Roman oculists' stamps found in Great Britain

Location of find (Roman name)	Year of find	Named ingredients	Oculist's name
Bath (<i>Aquae Sulis</i>)	1731 1923	Vinegar, quince	T Iunianus Flavius Litugenus
Bedford (Biggleswade) (Harrod)	1873 1895	Vinegar, celandine, poppy Copper oxide, misy*	Gaius Valerius Amandus Gaius Iunius Tertullus Lucius Iulius Salutaris Marinus
Cambridge (<i>Durohiponte</i>)	1984		Quintus Iulius Martinus
Chester (<i>Deva</i>)	1973	Saffron	
Cirencester (<i>Corinium</i>)	1808	Frankincense, quince	Minervalis
Colchester (<i>Camulodunum</i>)	1900	Frankincense, quince, poppy	Atticus
Dorchester (<i>Durnovaria</i>)	1719	Saffron, quince	Quintus Iulius Murranus
Edinburgh (Tranent)	1975	Saffron	Martialis
Gloucester (Lydney Park)	1937	Saffron	
Hereford (Kenchester) (<i>Magnis</i>)	1846	Saffron	Lucius Valerius Latinus
Ipswich (Whitton)	c 1830	Quince	Iulius Iucundus
Kendal (Watercrook)	1842	Nard, frankincense	Titus Vindacius Ariovistus
Lincoln (Littleborough)	1963	Copper oxide, gall	Aurelius Polychronius
London (<i>Londinium</i>)	1931		
Newport (<i>Caerleon; Isca</i>)	1974		Publius Clodius
Norwich (Caistor St Edmunds) (<i>Venta Icenorum</i>)	1927		
Oxford (Wilcote)	1974		
Shrewsbury (Wroxeter) (<i>Viroconium</i>)	1842	Saffron	Lucius Iulius Senex
St Albans (<i>Verulamium</i>)	1929	Saffron	Lucius Iulius Senex
Waterford (Clonmel)	1931	Misy	Gaius Silvius Tetricus
York	1955	Saffron	Lucius Iulius Senex
			Publius Anicius Sedatus
			Maurus
		Frankincense	Tiberius Claudius M
		Balsam, myrrh	Lucius Iulius Iuvenis
		Misy	Flavius Secundus
		Misy	Marcus Iuventus Tutianus
		Misy	Iulius Alexander

*Probably copper pyrites.