

# A SHEARMAN'S HOOK FROM LONDON

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The iron object described here<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1.1) was found on the Thames foreshore, just to the west of Southwark Bridge on the north side of the river.

It is a double-ended hook 91 mm in length, with the barbs pointing inwards. A rectangular block in the centre has (?) scored lines which cross diagonally on three faces, and there are four smaller knobs along the shaft, two between each barb and the centre. These knobs too have diagonally intersecting lines, on the upper faces only.

The hook is a *havette*, or *habick*<sup>2</sup>, and was used by shearmen to hold newly-woven cloths while the nap was trimmed. A length of cloth was draped over a bench with a padded top and held taut with a havette at each corner, fixed through the textile into the padding<sup>3</sup> (see Pl. 1). The central block is a grip, by which to hold the hook while fixing or removing it. The intersecting lines seem to be purely decorative.

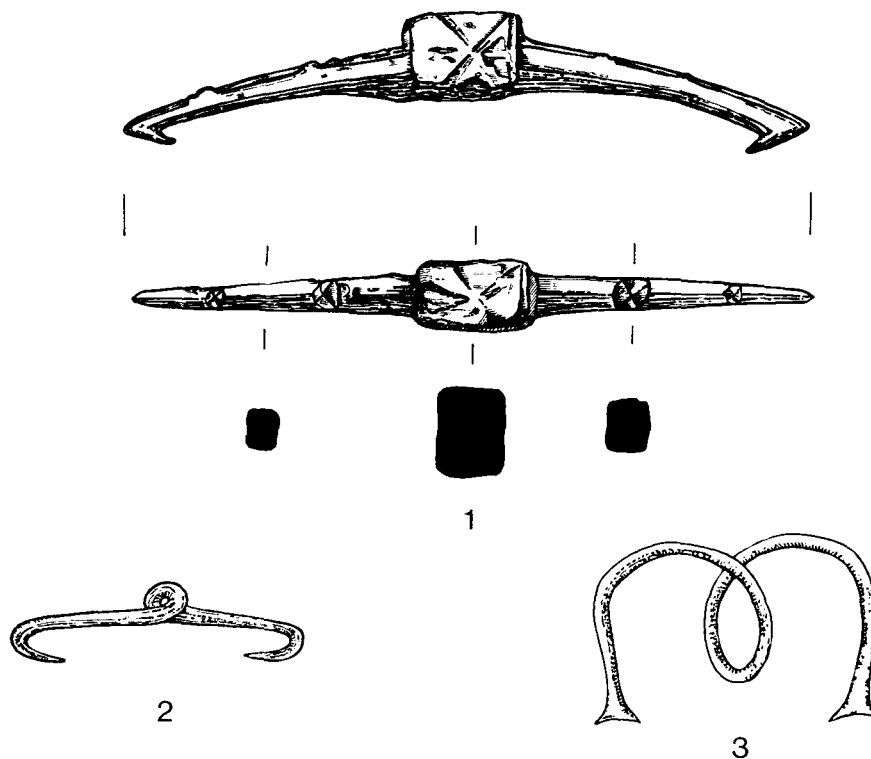


Fig. 1.1 Havette (shearman's hook) found in London (Scale 1:1).

1.2 Havette with the shaft looped to form the grip. Taken from a version of the *Clothworkers' Arms* published in 1677 (Not to scale).

1.3 Havette with a grip formed by a loop on the underside. Taken from an unattributed version of the *Clothworkers' Arms* published in the 19th century, drawn by someone possibly unaware of the function of the original object, since the shape seems to be a poor design to retain tension (Not to scale).

Havettes of iron and bronze, of 14th or 15th century date, found at the Lower Brook Street excavations in Winchester are of slightly different forms<sup>4</sup>. Examples illustrated in Diderot's *Encyclopaedia* in the 18th century have an oval swelling in the centre for the grip in one case, and another has just a plain shaft<sup>5</sup>. (Havettes of further forms are shown in Figs. 1.2, 1.3, and Fig. 2 right).

The foreshore example is remarkable in having the same diagonally intersecting lines on the grip as those depicted in the Arms of the Clothworkers' Company of London granted in 1530<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 2 left). Although the havettes here seem to be relatively shorter and thicker, with a less pronounced grip than the foreshore example, the intersecting lines perhaps suggest a similar date.

Towards the end of the hand-shearing era, which lasted in the north of England into the 19th century, a row of single-barbed hooks (attached at the other end to a tape) was fixed along one edge of the cloth on the bench to give additional tension, while the other edge seems to have been held by havettes (see Pl. 2).



Fig. 2 (left) Arms of the Clothworkers' Company of London from the grant of 1530; (right) Arms of the Shearman of London, who were incorporated in 1527/8 with the Fullers as the Company of Clothworkers. The havettes appear to have triple grips.

## NOTES

1. Museum of London Acc. No. 79.60.
2. The name 'habick' apparently replaced 'havette' during the 17th century. The earlier term is retained throughout this account for the sake of simplicity. See J. Bromley and H. Child *The Armorial Bearings of the Guilds of London* (London, 1960) 47-9.
3. In addition to the plates here, a woodcut showing a havette in use is reproduced in H. Body *Textiles* (London, 1976) 36, Fig. 16.
4. Two examples of iron and two of bronze are to be published in *Winchester Studies* 7 ii M. Biddle and S. Keene eds. (Oxford, forthcoming).
5. Diderot et d'Alembert *Encyclopedie, Recueil de Planches*

*sur les Sciences et les Arts* 2.2 (Paris, 1763) Draperie Pl. 8, Figs. 34 and 33.

6. Fig. 2 is reproduced by permission of Frederick Warne & Co., from *op. cit.* in note 2, 48.  
Fig. 1.2 is after C. Welch *Coat-Armour of the London Livery Companies* (London, 1914) Pl. 20, (taken from R. Wallis *London's Armory* (1677)) and Fig. 1.3 is after W. Boyne *Trade Tokens Issued in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1858 unpaginated).  
Pl. 1 is reproduced by permission of Bruckmann, Munich, from *Das Hausbuch des Mendelschen Zwolfbruderstiftung* W. Treue *et al.* eds. (Munich, 1965) 138.  
Pl. 2 is of an engraving published c. 1811, without an accompanying text, in Huddersfield.

#### Addendum

I am indebted to my colleague, Jon Cotton, for bringing to my attention a bronze object described as a clasp (A. W. G. Lowther, 'Roman and Saxon Periods', in K. P. Oakley *et al.* 'A Survey of the Farnham District' *Surrey Archaeological Collections* (1939) 257 Fig. 112, No. 2). It was found in a Saxon hut excavated in Farnham. There are inward-facing barbs at each end, and diagonal transverse lines on the faces of a central rectangular feature, but the object is only some 60mm in length.

Despite the overall resemblance to a shearman's hook (a type of artefact unknown in the Saxon period), this find does not have the havette's characteristic curve of the shaft, which is necessary to allow it to be fixed into the cloth. Other objects similar to the Farnham one are known from Frankish graves. They are probably clasps or dress fasteners. (I am grateful to Mrs L. Webster of the British Museum, Dept. of Medieval and Later Antiquities, for her advice on this matter.) The points of similarity to havettes are therefore purely coincidental.

I am grateful to Mr I. H. Goodall, Mr R. A. Innes of the Calderdale Museums Service (who provided the photograph for Pl. 2), Dr D. Keene of the Winchester Research Unit and Mr K. G. Ponting of the Pasold Research Fund for their helpful information, and to Katherine Hayes who drew the illustrations. All interpretation is the responsibility of the author.