

# SAXON HANDLED COMBS FROM LONDON

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## SUMMARY

*Fourteen Anglo-Saxon handled combs have been recovered from the London area. Seven of these combs are described here and arranged in a chronological sequence. It is suggested that handled combs were produced in England during the Middle and Late Saxon periods and that they are not indicative of Frisian presence or influence.*

## INTRODUCTION

Handled combs from a number of sites have been published or republished recently, generally with the understanding that the comb type is rare and indicative of Frisian production or influence (MacGregor 1985, 91; Tyler 1986; Daniels 1988, 195 and fig 37.1; Dunlevy 1988, 365–6; Haldenby 1992, 35–6 and fig 7.2; but cf Hodges 1980; Riddler 1990). The publication of new examples, principally from monasteries and trading centres, has now increased numbers well beyond those listed by Waterman (1959, 90 note 5). A new handlist of published examples from Anglo-Saxon contexts is given in Table 2. As well as new discoveries, some of the combs mentioned by Waterman have now been discussed in detail. They include combs from Great Wakering and Cambois (Tyler 1986; Alexander 1987). The time is ripe, therefore, for a description of the London corpus and a brief examination of the nature of the comb type. It is suggested here that the type is resolutely Anglo-Saxon and that it is, indeed, one of the most representative of all forms of Middle and Late Saxon comb. This point is developed below, following a consideration of the London series.

The comb type is defined by the presence of a handle of bone or antler beyond a series of tooth and end segments. Most examples are single-sided, and handled combs with two rows of teeth are rare. The complete comb from the Thames illustrates the manner in which the front end segment sweeps forward in a curve from the connecting plates (Fig 2c). Two forms of comb construction have been identified. A northern variant, seen with the comb from Cambois, utilises a two-part handle secured along its length by rivets (Alexander 1987). The customary type south of the Humber, however, utilises a shaped antler tine, or a cattle or sheep metapodial, within which a channel has been sawn to receive the tooth and end segments. These are secured by iron rivets, after which the comb teeth are cut by saw, generally leaving conspicuous traces along the lower edge of the connecting plates. Unfinished examples from *Hamwic* confirm these methods of construction (Riddler forthcoming C).

## THE LONDON SERIES

Fourteen handled combs have been recovered from the London area (Table 1). Several are shortly to be published, including examples from Jubilee Hall and Whitehall. A comb from Battersea can be included in the series and Arthur MacGregor has illustrated a complete example from the Thames which is not, however, specifically ascribed to London (Blackmore 1986, 214; MacGregor 1985, fig 50.0). For that reason, it has not been included here.

Two combs come from recent excavations within the City; both are unpublished. A comb

**TABLE 1 Saxon handled combs from London**

?River Thames	Middle Saxon	Figure 1a
Wandsworth	Middle Saxon	Figure 1b
?London	Middle Saxon	Figure 1c
City, Lombard St	Eighth/Ninth Century	Figure 2a
Runnymede	Ninth/Tenth Century	Figure 2b
River Thames	Late Saxon	Figure 2c
?London	Tenth Century	Figure 2d
Jubilee Hall	Middle Saxon	Blackmore, 1988
Barking Abbey 1	Middle Saxon	Unpublished
Barking Abbey 2	Middle Saxon	Unpublished
Whitehall	Middle Saxon	Green 1963, fig 5
Battersea	Middle Saxon	Blackmore 1986, 214
City, Paternoster Square	?Middle Saxon	Unpublished
City, Vintry House	?Late Saxon	Unpublished

from a watching brief at Paternoster Square (PAT90 acc 1) is almost complete, whilst that from excavations at Vintry House (VRY89 acc. 26) consists of a fragment from the central part of the comb. Unfortunately, neither add materially to dating evidence for the comb type within London.

Seven handled combs with London provenances are described and illustrated here in chronological order. They were largely recovered from within or about the Thames and some of their provenances are little more than possibilities. Nonetheless, if viewed as an assemblage, they do shed some light on a significant form of Anglo-Saxon comb.

In the following text each comb is described separately, after which the nature and distribution of the type is discussed. The present location of each London handled comb accompanies its description. The combs themselves are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. Terms used in comb descriptions are those of Galloway (1976). In addition, a distinction is made between the front end segment and the back end segment of a handled comb. The front end segment is the curved terminal extending beyond the connecting plates; the back end segment is the segment closest to the comb handle.

#### **Comb 1** (Fig 1a)

?River Thames, London. Museum of London Reserve Collection 4009

A provenance of 'Thames, London' was given by Winter to a handled comb subsequently illustrated by Baldwin-Brown (Winter 1906, taf

28.84; Baldwin-Brown 1915, pl LXXXIV.4). Baldwin-Brown was not convinced by this provenance, observing that the comb 'was probably found in London although this is not quite certain' (Baldwin-Brown 1915, 390). MacGregor referred to its Thames find location and noted Winter's assessment that the comb is made of wood. As MacGregor suspected, however, the comb is in fact made of antler (MacGregor 1985, 91). The comb is probably to be identified with an entry in the Guildhall Museum Catalogue which describes a 'comb, bone, with short handle at one end, ornamented with incised lines' (Guildhall Museum 1908, no. 107).

The comb is incomplete but its handle and most of its connecting plates survive. Its tooth segments are fastened by three iron rivets and the comb teeth are noticeably long, whilst the comb handle is somewhat short. The handle is faceted and is decorated on one side of the comb by bands of incised lines, which recur also on the connecting plates. Figure 1a shows the display side of the comb; the other side has been illustrated by Baldwin-Brown (1915, pl LXXXIV.4).

This comb is notable for the faceting of its handle into an octagonal profile. This is only rarely seen with handled combs although it does occur on an example from North Elmham which is of Northumbrian type (Wade-Martins 1980, fig 259.5). This comb is the earliest of the North Elmham handled comb series, coming from a context of the 8th or early 9th centuries (Wade-Martins 1980, 124). A similar type of faceted handle occurs with the charred remnants of a comb from Loveden Hill cremation K181; I have

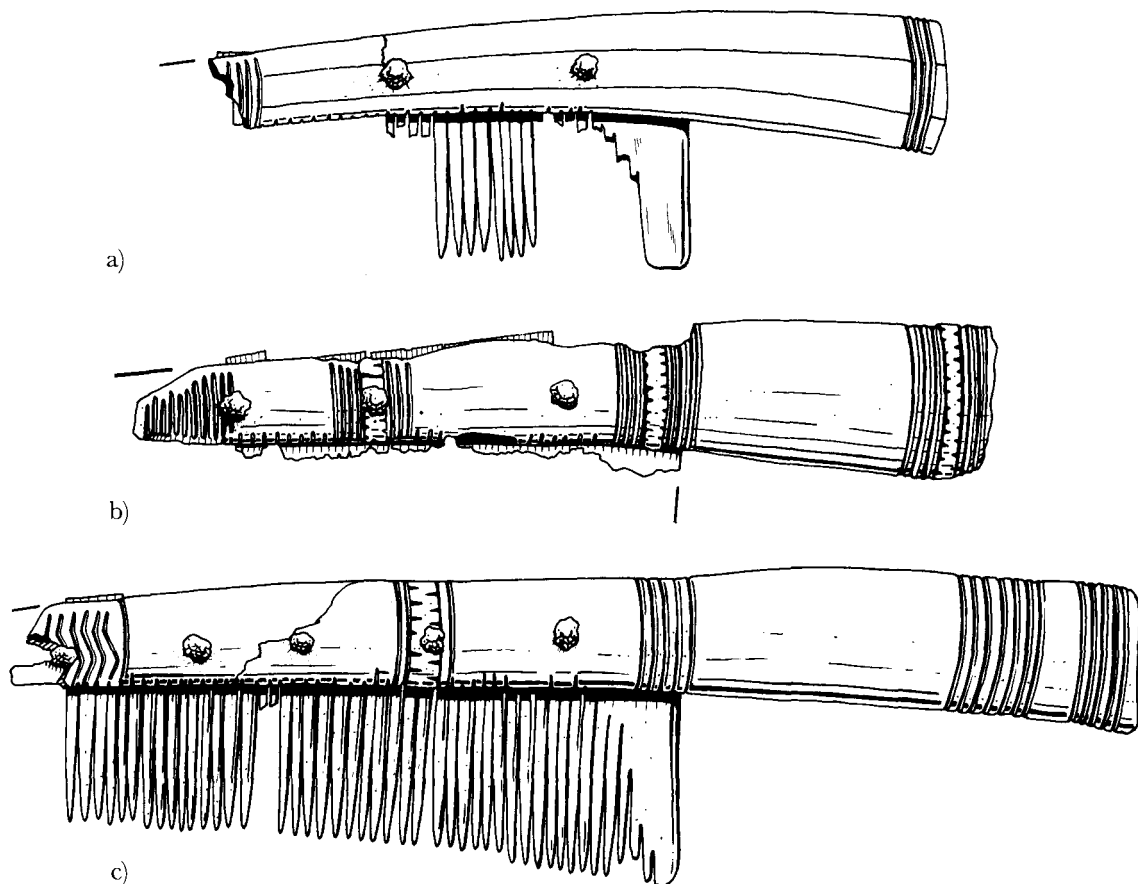


Fig 1. a) Comb 1: ?River Thames, London; b) Comb 2: Wandsworth; c) Comb 3: ?London

suggested that these originally formed part of a faceted handled comb of the 7th century (Riddler, forthcoming A). This corpus of combs with faceted handles forms a small variant subgroup, dating evidence for which is scanty, but which might suggest that the type belongs to the earlier part of the Middle Saxon period. The Loveden Hill comb is among the earliest Anglo-Saxon examples of the type. Few other Anglo-Saxon handled combs can in fact be dated to the 7th century; and Frisian handled combs were considered to date from the later 7th century onwards (Roes 1963, 22-3).

#### Comb 2 (Fig. 1b)

Wandsworth. Museum of London Reserve Collection, Milton Price Collection A7346

A handled comb from the Thames at Wandsworth was illustrated by Wheeler and reconstructed by

analogy with a further comb from London described below (Wheeler 1935, fig 30). The comb is made of antler and includes four tooth segments and a back end segment, fastened by three iron rivets. The front end segment is missing and the handle end is fragmentary, if almost complete. The comb is decorated about the handle by a continuous fret pattern set within accompanying bands of incised lines. This decoration is twice repeated along the display connecting plate. A long series of incised lines is cut into the end of the display connecting plate; the other connecting plate is plain. The rivets are evenly-spaced and pass indiscriminately through the decoration. They fasten each tooth and end segment along one edge and the segments are of variable lengths, accommodated to the rivet spacing.

Fret pattern on combs has been regarded as largely of Late Saxon date (Care-Evans &

Galloway 1983, 827). It can be seen upon a comb from Sutton Hoo, however, and on an unpublished 7th century double-sided composite comb from *Hamwic*. Where it occurs on a double-sided composite comb from York, there is no certainty that the comb is Late Saxon; it could equally well be Middle Saxon (Care-Evans and Galloway 1983, fig 586; Riddler forthcoming B; Waterman 1959, fig 17.3). Comparable designs can also be seen on handled combs from Aylesbury, Bedford, Birka, Canterbury St Martins and York (Elger 1886–9; Arbman 1937, taf 74; Rady 1987, fig 29.52; Waterman 1959, fig 17.1). Dating evidence for these combs is poor, those from Bedford and York being 9th century discoveries. Some arguments have been presented, however, for the dating of the Birka comb. It was rightly regarded by Arbman as a comb imported into the settlement, and probably of Frisian origin (Arbman 1937, 238). It would not have arrived at Birka before the 9th century and Tempel has noted that combs with this specific form of fret pattern decoration were only in production in Frisia between the middle of the 8th century and the early 9th century (Tempel 1979, 168). This serves, therefore, as appropriate dating for the Birka comb. The Aylesbury comb came from a ditch of Middle Saxon date, possibly no earlier than the 8th century.

Figure 2 also indicates that Wheeler's reconstruction of the Wandsworth comb, though accurate for the front end segment, is incorrect for the handle, which was not splayed.

### **Comb 3** (Fig. 1c)

?London. British Museum M & LA Ransom Collection 1915 12–8 209

A handled comb displayed in the British Museum was acquired from the Ransom collection and is regarded as unprovenanced (Waterman 1959, 90 note 5). It is known, however, that most of the Ransom material was collected from Hitchin or the City of London (Smith 1917–8, 57 note 1). A City provenance for this comb is suggested also by its colour and condition. It is now a deep brown colour with well-preserved iron rivets, largely devoid of corrosion product, and it retains its original polish. Its colour and condition reflect preservation in damp or waterlogged deposits like those to be found on the Thames waterfront

or within the Fleet and Walbrook valleys. It is quite possible, therefore, that this comb came from the vicinity of the City.

The comb is almost complete and lacks only its front end segment, most of which has broken away in antiquity. Four tooth segments and the front and back end segments were fastened by five iron rivets so that each tooth segment was secured on both vertical edges. The rivets are evenly spaced and were applied after the comb had been decorated, passing (in two instances) indiscriminately through the decoration. The back end segment is rivetted on one edge but is further secured by a small amount of bone packing adjacent to the handle. The front end segment was held originally by a single rivet, passing through it. The comb is made of antler throughout and it is decorated about the handle by two bands of incised lines. It possesses a display side (shown in the illustration) which includes three further bands of decoration. Incised lines also adorn the junction of handle and back end segment and to the left of this is an area of fret pattern bounded by doubled incised lines. The end of the connecting plate is embellished with gently zig-zagging lines bounded by a single line. Tooth marks from the cutting of the teeth overlie the decoration, suggesting that the comb was decorated before the teeth were cut and the tooth and end segments were fastened. This method of tooth production is customary in the Anglo-Saxon period (Addyman and Hill 1969, 75). It is interesting to note that almost all of the handled combs described here have display sides, and that tooth marks invariably cut into this side in a more or less regular fashion, but are not seen on the opposite side. The tooth marks can be regarded as an additional element of the decorative scheme.

The decoration of this comb reflects that of the handled comb from Wandsworth and it should also be of Middle Saxon date. The undulating line pattern at the end of the display connecting plate is a rare feature seldom encountered on handled combs or combs of other types. It can be seen, however, on the end of the handle of the comb from Great Wakering (Tyler 1986, fig 1.3).

The comb is notable also for the well-preserved state of its teeth, scarcely any of which are absent in what survives of the tooth and end segments.

The teeth are marked by horizontal striations acquired by use and some teeth are worn and 'beaded', indicating that the comb had been used for some time before it was discarded (Holdsworth 1976, 45). The excellent condition of the comb suggests that it was discarded inadvertently, rather than deliberately.

**Comb 4** (Fig. 2a)  
City of London, Lombard Street. Now Missing

This comb represents one of few handled combs to have come from an archaeological context in London and one of fewer still to have come from the City itself. It was discovered during

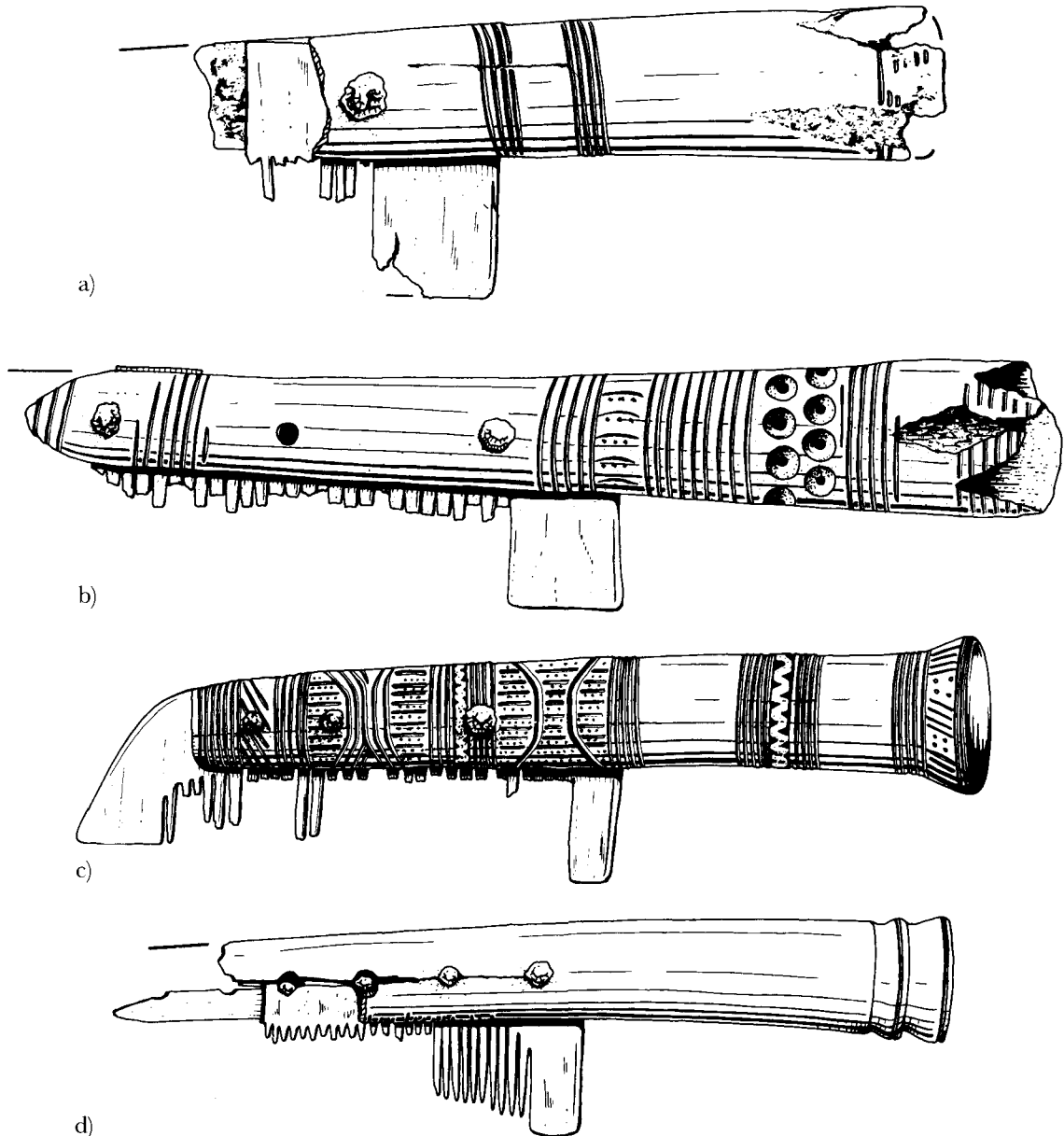


Fig 2. a) Comb 4: Lombard Street, City of London; b) Comb 5: Runnymede; c) Comb 6: River Thames; d) Comb 7: ?London

excavations at the site of the Chase National Bank of New York, Lombard Street, in 1955–6 (Marsden 1970). The comb is now missing but some details of its nature and construction can be obtained from the published photograph and an unpublished archive drawing (Marsden 1970, pl 1). The fragmentary nature of the end part of the comb and its straight profile suggest that it was produced from bone and not antler and it was probably manufactured from a cattle metatarsus. Handled combs from Anglo-Saxon contexts are manufactured from bone or antler, and occasionally from a combination of these materials (Riddler 1990; Daniels 1988, 195). At present, it appears that only the Anglo-Saxon examples of this comb-type involve the use of bone; Continental handled combs seem almost invariably to be made from antler. Traces of one rivet, a back end segment and a tooth segment can be seen on the comb from Lombard Street and they indicate a rivetting system under which one edge of each segment is secured, as with the Wandsworth comb. The decoration is limited to bands of incised lines disposed at the end of the handle and towards the junction of handle and comb teeth. This is a simple and sparse form of decoration which recalls that of the faceted comb described above. It is seen also on a handled comb from the Thames as well as on further combs from Brandon, *Hamwic*, North Elmham and York (MacGregor 1985, fig 50.0; Holdsworth 1976, fig 21.4; Wade-Martins 1980, fig 259.3 and 4; MacGregor 1978, fig 29.9). The Brandon and *Hamwic* handled combs are Middle Saxon and include examples made of bone as well as antler. One of the combs from North Elmham has been ascribed to a context of the late 9th century; the other was recovered from the topsoil (Wade-Martins 1980, 126–8). The York comb came from Skeldergate and is presumably Late Saxon, although the site is not completely published as yet and full details of the comb are not known. The simple bone comb from Lombard Street is thus of a type which centres on the Middle Saxon period but which may occur also in Late Saxon contexts. Conceivably, the comb is Middle Saxon, or belongs to an early part of the Late Saxon period (*cf* Vince 1990, 24).

**Comb 5** (Fig. 2b)  
Runnymede. British Museum

A handled comb from Runnymede has been illustrated by C D Fortnum (1886–9). It is a

noticeably straight comb, possibly produced from a cattle metatarsus. Three rivets survive, fastening each tooth and end segment along one edge. The decoration of the handle includes a series of splayed perforations cut through the bone, as well as a band of line-and-dot pattern. I have discussed combs with perforated handles elsewhere, in connection with an example from Haithabu (Riddler 1990). The series has a markedly Anglian distribution, with examples from Brandon, Goltho, Ipswich, Saffron Walden, St. Neots, Flatford Mill and Sedgeford. It includes also combs from *Hamwic*, Canterbury St. Michaels, Haithabu and Dorestad (Beresford 1975, fig 36.3; Bassett 1982, fig 51.10; Lethbridge and Tebbutt 1933, fig 3.2; Ulbricht 1978, taf 34.6; Roes 1965, pl XXVII, 201). The line-and-dot decoration which accompanies the perforated handle is seen also on combs from Lagore and Sedgeford, as well as on the comb from the Thames described below (Hencken 1950, fig 99.608). Combs with perforated handles extend in date from the later part of the Middle Saxon period into the Late Saxon period. The Haithabu comb, recovered from a 9th or 10th century-deposit, substantiates this dating, as the Dorestad comb might also, if its context could be related to the known duration of occupation of that site. Combs from Goltho, St Neots and Saffron Walden are Late Saxon, and the *Hamwic* fragment comes from the later phase of occupation of that settlement (Riddler 1990).

**Comb 6** (Fig 2c)  
River Thames. British Museum M&LA91,  
4–18,16

The celebrated handled comb published by Reginald Smith and illustrated in the Victoria County History for London was also illustrated by Winter and described as from ‘Thames, London’ (Smith 1909, 164; Winter 1906, taf 28.85). It is probably to be identified with a handled comb described by the Reverend J. C. Clutterbuck as ‘found in the Thames not long since near London, and ... in the national collection’ (Clutterbuck 1873–6, 458). Blackmore has subsequently localised the comb to the Battersea area (Blackmore 1988). It is made of antler throughout and includes three tooth segments and two end segments secured by three unevenly-spaced rivets. The front end segment is perforated; the remainder are secured along one

edge. The end of the handle is splayed outwards. Modelled handles of this format may have been introduced as a decorative device although, equally, it should be noted that they do allow the handle to be held more firmly. The modelling of handles in this manner is probably a device introduced in the Late Saxon period. It is seen on an unpublished comb from Barking Abbey, which can be compared with the handle of a comb from Dorestad (Roes 1965, pl XXV.195). It occurs also on an unpublished comb from Canterbury, St. Michaels whose decorative scheme would suggest that it was produced in the 10th century. This comb itself can be compared with a handled comb from Barton Court Farm (Miles 1984, fig 33). The latter comb is clearly of 9th or 10th century-date. It was hoped by the excavator that its dating—given there as 8th–10th century—could be revised to the early Anglo-Saxon period, to allow it to be aligned with other material of that date from the site (Miles 1984, 18 and 36). As noted above, however, no Anglo-Saxon handled combs occur prior to the 7th century and they are not seen in substantial numbers until the 8th century. The Barton Court Farm comb is a fine example of a handled comb of the 9th or 10th century and it suggests that a ‘dichotomy’ of phasing for that site does exist, and requires re-evaluation (Miles 1984, 18).

The comb from the Thames is decorated by a variety of motifs, including fret pattern, horizontal line-and-dot decoration (seen also on the comb from Runnymede described above), diagonal lines and dots with horizontal lines. It cannot be closely paralleled for its bewildering combination of decoration, an aspect differentiating it from all other combs described here, which invoke a repetition of a restricted number of decorative patterns. An interest in decorating all of a display connecting plate and part of a handle is seen on combs from Cambois and York, and possibly on the comb from Great Wakering (Alexander 1987, fig 5; Kemp 1988, 260; Tyler 1986, fig 1.3). The particular patterns employed, however, do not resemble those on the Thames comb. Its closest parallel lies, perhaps, with the comb from Lagore, of which only a small fragment remains, unfortunately (Hencken 1950, fig 99.608). In addition, it can be noted that it is predominantly with handled combs of the Late Saxon period that an increased interest in decoration is seen, revealed equally at Brandon, Canterbury (fig 3) and Rochester (Harrison and Flight 1968,

fig 18.2). Ironically, it is at this period also that we witness the emergence of the undecorated handled comb.

### Comb 7 (Fig 2d)

London. Museum of London, Layton Collection O.2015

This comb has been published recently (Riddler 1990, abb 1.3). It is made from antler throughout and includes a back end segment and two tooth segments, secured by four rivets. Traces of two further rivets also survive. The comb is notable for several developments in design and construction. The rivets are closely and evenly-spaced and attach tooth and end segments in an indiscriminate manner. Individual segments can be secured by one or more rivets, through their centres or about their edges. The comb handle is modelled—although it is not splayed—and the comb is otherwise undecorated. The closest parallel for this comb lies undoubtedly with another of similar design from Haithabu; indeed, the combs are sufficiently similar to suggest that they were produced by the same person (Ulbricht 1978, taf 34.7; Riddler 1990, 179 and abb 1, 2 and 3). Closely-spaced rivetting of this type does not occur before the middle of the 10th century and continues into the medieval period; it can be seen at Lund and Schleswig, for example (Persson 1976; Ulbricht 1984, tafn 27–9, 64–7 and 70–2). A related handled comb from *Hamwic* has been published on several occasions and could be seen as a precursor of these developments (Addyman and Hill 1969, pl VII; Hodges 1980, fig 1.2). It is a large, undecorated comb with closely-spaced rivetting and—in distinction to most handled combs—it is double-sided. It can be compared with undecorated combs from Aardenburg and Middleburg, as noted by Hodges (Trimpe Burger 1965; Hodges 1980, 146). A further undecorated handled comb has come from Elisenhof and others are known from Bergen and Oslo (Tempel 1979; Grieg 1933). Undecorated handled combs do not appear before the 9th century and most seem to be somewhat later, extending on the Continent into the medieval period. The London comb can be dated to the 10th century by analogy with its counterpart from Haithabu; the Southampton comb may also be of this date.

The comb forms a part of the Layton

collection. This includes material from the City, although this particular item lacks a precise provenance. It is likely that the comb came from London, but this cannot be proved.

### HANDLED COMBS AND FRISIAN COMBS

It has been assumed throughout that the London handled combs are Anglo-Saxon combs. Recent publications, however, regard handled combs as essentially Frisian, and see them as representing connections of trade or exchange, or as evidence for the presence of Frisians themselves (Waterman 1959, 89–90; Holdsworth 1976, 46–7; MacGregor 1985, 91; Tyler 1986; Daniels 1988, 195; Dunlevy 1988, 165–6). Behind this attribution lies almost a century of discussion during which the origins of handled combs have been seen to move from Scandinavia to Frisia, and thence to England. It is within this broader context that their actual origins can be sought.

At the beginning of the century handled combs had Scandinavian affiliations. In discussing the Cambois comb Hodges noted that they ‘can be assigned with little hesitation to the Danish period’ (Hodges 1905, 216). This comb came to date the Cambois burial (or burials) in the British Museum guide to Anglo-Saxon antiquities, and it became Scandinavian:

... and the date of both [brooches] is approximately given by the bone comb of Scandinavian type, with whip-handle, found with the Cambois example in a barrow near Bedlington, Northumberland. (Smith 1923, 101).

There is some disparity between the claim of Hodges that ‘many combs of this kind’ were to be found in York, and the statement of Smith that ‘several have been found in York’ (Hodges 1905, 216; Smith 1905, 164). Waterman published just two handled combs from York, to which MacGregor has added a further pair. Another example has recently been illustrated, while 10 others remain unpublished, and new discoveries have come from the Fishergate excavations (Waterman 1959, fig 17.1 and 2; MacGregor 1978, fig 29.9; Kemp 1988; Daniels 1988, 195; Rogers forthcoming).

The Scandinavian ascription of the comb type could not remain unchallenged for long. There was a noticeable lack of handled combs from Scandinavia itself, and those published were of

medieval date (Grieg 1933; Blomqvist 1942). Whilst the Cambois comb was still ‘of Scandinavian type, with whip-handle’ in 1940 Arbman had, at practically the same time, published the Birka comb with the understanding that it was certainly an import from the Frisian area (Bjorn and Shetelig 1940, 22; Arbman 1937, 238). An influential comb in this respect was that published by Holwerda from Dorestad (Holwerda 1930, afb. 72). This comb, and the established historical link between the Frisians and York, led Waterman to his assertion that the handled comb ‘is possibly of Frisian origin or at least owes its distribution to Frisian trading ...’ (Waterman 1959, 89–90). The publication by Roes of six Frisian handled combs helped to endorse this opinion, which is now well-established in Anglo-Saxon archaeology (Roes 1963, pl. XXVIII). It relies to a large extent upon an assessment of the distribution pattern for handled combs, which remains, as Waterman noted, based ‘sporadically from England, the Rhineland, the North Sea coast of Holland, and Scandinavia’ (Waterman 1959, 90). Merovingian examples of the type are distinctive and include combs from Boppard, Chambrai, Dieue-sur-Meuse, ‘Flanders’, Flonheim, Halsketten, Marktoberdorft, Nancy and Reichenau (Roes 1963, 22–3; Christlein 1966, taf 33.13; Hodges 1980). It is important to note, as earlier observed by Hodges, how this type differs in form from Frisian and Anglo-Saxon handled combs (Hodges 1980). The few ‘Viking Age’ handled combs from Scandinavia have been considered by Tempel. They are limited to the Birka comb and to a possible handled comb from Broa (Tempel 1979, 170; Nermann 1969, taf 292.2315).

If handled combs are scarce in Scandinavia, neither are they abundant in Frisia, despite general opinion. Tempel could number only 18 Frisian handled combs among his survey of 2,000 combs from the North Sea littoral (Tempel 1969; 1979, 170). This total includes the six combs illustrated by Roes, as well as eight handled combs from Dorestad. Previous estimates of the number of handled combs from Dorestad have been somewhat low. Thus, Hübener knew of only one example—that illustrated by Holwerda—and he believed that the type was not made there (Hübener 1953, 187). Janssen had earlier published a further three handled combs from Dorestad, however, and four further examples have been illustrated by Roes (Janssen



1843; Roes 1965, pl XXV.194 & 195, pl XXVII.201 and pl XXIX.221; Riddler 1990). Nonetheless, Hübener may not have been entirely incorrect: a number of the Dorestad combs look to be of Merovingian type. Handled combs were not illustrated by van Giffen, Haarnagel, Boeles or La Baume, although each author did produce sequences of Frisian combs (van Giffen 1940; Haarnagel 1959; Boeles 1951; La Baume 1952–3). Neither were they included by Tempel in his description of Frisian combs of the 8th to 10th centuries (Tempel 1972).

Finds of handled combs from Anglo-Saxon contexts now present an image of plenty, in contrast to the paucity of handled combs from the Continent. Published examples are listed in Table 2 and further unpublished handled combs are known from Aylesbury, Barking Abbey, Battersea, Brandon, Canterbury, Colchester,

Durham County, Ipswich and York; there are also several handled combs, now lacking provenance, in the British Museum, Reading Museum and the Ashmolean Museum. The greatest concentration lies, however, at *Hamwic*. In addition to the published examples cited in Table 2, over 40 further unpublished examples are known; and several sites have produced modified cattle metapodia, clearly intended to serve eventually as handled combs (Riddler, forthcoming B and C). The Southampton collection will undoubtedly repay further study, as Holdsworth has indicated (Holdsworth 1976, 47); but its importance here lies in the evidence it provides for the Middle and Late Saxon production of handled combs. Table 2 also strongly indicates that handled combs are an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. With the addition of the 14 London combs, of at least 40 combs from

TABLE 2 Published handled combs from Anglo-Saxon contexts

Abingdon	Miles 1984, fig 33
Bedford	Elger 1886–9
Brandon	Riddler 1990, 179
Cambois	Alexander 1987, fig 5
Canterbury	Rady 1987, fig 29.52
Canterbury	Brent 1879, pl 17 fig 3
Chichester	Down 1978, fig 10.44.207
Flatford Mill	Waterman 1959, 90 note 5
Goltho	Beresford 1975, fig 36.3
Great Wakering	Tyler 1986, fig 1.3
Hamwic	Holdsworth 1976, fig 21.11
Hamwic	Holdsworth 1976, fig 21.4
Hamwic	Hodges 1980, fig 1.2
Hamwic	Riddler 1990, abb 1.5
Hartlepool	Daniels 1988, fig 37.1
Ipswich	West 1963, fig 55.1
Ipswich	Waterman 1959, 90 note 5
Loveden Hill	Riddler, forthcoming A
North Elmham 1	Wade-Martins 1980, fig 259.1
North Elmham 2	Wade-Martins 1980, fig 259.2
North Elmham 3	Wade-Martins 1980, fig 259.3
North Elmham 4	Wade-Martins 1980, fig 259.4
North Elmham 5	Wade-Martins 1980, fig 259.5
River Thames	MacGregor 1985, fig 50.o
Rochester	Harrison and Flight 1968, fig 18.2
Saffron Walden	Bassett 1982, fig 51.10
St. Neots	Lethbridge and Tebbutt 1933, fig 3.2
St. Osyth	Waterman 1959, 90 note 5
West Stow	West 1985, fig 253.15
Whitby	Peers and Radford 1943, fig 20.1
York 1	Waterman 1959, fig 17.1
York 2	Waterman 1959, fig 17.2
York 3	MacGregor 1978, fig 29.9
York 4	Kemp 1988, 260; Rogers forthcoming
Yorkshire Wolds	Haldenby 1992, fig 7.2
Unprovenanced, Ashmolean Museum	Waterman 1959, 90 note 5
Unprovenanced, Reading Museum	Waterman 1959, 90 note 5

*Hamwic*, of at least five from Ipswich, of ten or more from York and several others described above, the number of Anglo-Saxon handled combs extends to almost one hundred.

We return, in fact, to one of the earliest of all accounts of handled combs which, in once again describing the Cambois comb, notes that 'they are all possibly Anglo-Saxon' (Clutterbuck 1873-6, 458-9). The presumption should indeed be that those found in England were actually made there. The image thus revealed is analogous to that presented for barred zoomorphic combs by Catherine Hills (1981). This comb type had also been regarded as Frisian, but a detailed study of the comb distribution revealed the likelihood of Anglo-Saxon production. Further finds from Loveden Hill have emphasised not only the Anglo-Saxon nature of the type, but also the extent to which its distribution (even allowing for vagaries in identification) remains centered on the Anglo-Saxon cremation cemetery of Spong Hill (Riddler, forthcoming A).

## CONCLUSION

Handled combs from the London area are remarkable for their variety. With the possible exception of combs from Lombard Street and Vintry House, they are otherwise distinct for material, construction and decoration. A similar image is presented by the published combs from York, and by those from Ipswich. In contrast, earlier assemblages from Brandon and *Hamwic* are less disparate and more uniform. Conceivably these differences can be correlated with suggestions that by the Late Saxon period comb makers were itinerant, although this theory is not universally maintained (Ambrosiani 1981; MacGregor 1985; but compare Ulbricht 1978; Nordeide 1992; Ros 1992). It may be borne out, for example, by the distribution of combs with perforated handles. The wide distribution of this variety of the comb type can be contrasted with the earlier evidence for localised comb production. In addition, it may be seen in the London handled comb series, which extends from the Middle to Late Saxon period and reflects changes in handled comb design over time. The recent discovery of handled combs from the settlement to the west of the City is precisely what one would expect from a Middle

Saxon emporium (Green 1963, fig 5; Cowie and Whytehead 1989, fig 6; Blackmore 1988). The Lombard Street handled comb continues in this tradition and would not be out of place in a Middle Saxon milieu; neither would the comb from the Ransom Collection. The handled comb from the Thames at Wandsworth is of an established Middle Saxon type and the faceted handled comb with the broad and uncertain provenance of 'Thames, London' also belongs to this period. Several of these combs can be linked to the City itself, with greater or lesser certainty. It is possible that they were deposited in the Alfredian period, although they may represent earlier losses. They have mostly been recovered from the Thames.

The Runnymede comb, a distant outlier from London, is of a type now seen to belong to the later 9th or early 10th centuries. It is related to the comb with modelled handle recovered in all probability from the Thames near London which can be placed in the 10th century. The comb from the Layton collection would appear to be typologically later but it is closely paralleled by a comb from Haithabu and a 10th century date for the pair is quite feasible.

The few handled combs of Late Saxon date and London provenance reflect changes in the nature of the comb type which include greater variety and elaboration in decoration, the modelling of handles, and the adoption of antler as the raw material, to the exclusion of bone. It is interesting to note that the two handled combs from London's Middle Saxon settlement are made of bone, as also (it is suspected) are the combs from Lombard Street and Runnymede. A distinction between Middle Saxon bone handled combs and Late Saxon antler handled combs may therefore be broadly applicable. Both bone and antler handled combs occur in Middle Saxon contexts at *Hamwic* and Brandon, whereas Late Saxon handled combs from *Hamwic*, Canterbury, Ipswich, London and Rochester are invariably produced from antler. Bone handled combs thus appear to be a Middle Saxon phenomenon.

The final phase in Anglo-Saxon handled comb design is represented by the comb from the Layton collection whose lack of decoration and closely-spaced systematic rivetting anticipate developments in comb production of the early medieval period.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Lyn Blackmore, John Clark, Bob Cowie, Robin Densem, James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hodges, Nicola Trzaska-Nartowski, Ingrid Ulbricht, Alan Vince, Leslie Webster and Sue Youngs for their help. Phil Andrews, Duncan Brown, Alan Morton and John Oxley have provided welcome support and encouragement.

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*The Society is grateful to the Museum of London for a grant towards publication of this article.*