

An antler stamp from Melbourne Street, Southampton

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A re-evaluation of the antler and bone waste from Melbourne Street in Southampton revealed an antler stamp with circular indentations on two tines. Double-pronged antler stamps are known also from West Stow, and from Møen in Denmark. During the early Anglo-Saxon period antler stamps may have been used to decorate ceramics, although few direct comparisons can be made between stamps and stamp impressions and the correlation between them is general rather than specific. In recent decades the number of antler stamps has increased considerably. There are now nine stamps from Hamwic and ten from other middle and late Saxon sites, against just ten from sites of early Anglo-Saxon date. There is little correlation between stamps and stamped ceramics of the middle and late Saxon periods and it is more likely that these stamps were used to emboss vegetable-tanned leather. During the middle Saxon period antler stamps were also used, alongside other implements, to produce impressions on loomweights and there is a strong correlation with objects used by women. This provides the possibility that the stamps themselves were the possessions of women.

Introduction

I was fortunate to be able to spend some time discussing middle and late Saxon ceramics from Wharram Percy with Anna during the course of preparing the final volume on the settlement a few years ago. She patiently answered question after question and put forward her own ideas about Wharram and its ceramics, some of which were published in that last volume (Riddler, Clark and Slowikowski 2012). It was a privilege to be able to discuss these things and her responses were always vibrant and interesting. This contribution is intended as a small middle Saxon tribute to her. It considers a different part of the country but remains in the middle Saxon framework within which we worked together.

In the publication of several middle Saxon sites from Melbourne Street in Southampton it was originally intended that a specialist report would be provided for the waste material of worked antler and bone, but sadly, this did not materialise (Hinton 1980, 40). Some details were provided of a selection of the antler and bone objects from the five sites and bone working was considered within the comprehensive discussion of the animal provisioning of central *Hamwic* (Holdsworth 1980, 77, fig. 15; Bourdillon and Coy 1980, 96–7). The antler and bone waste from Melbourne Street has been examined more recently in the context of analysing material specific to southern *Hamwic*

(Riddler and Trzaska-Nartowski in prep). Within the waste material from SOU5, a site located immediately to the west of Melbourne Street (Holdsworth 1980, fig 4.1), is a double-pointed crown of red deer antler. The crown has been sawn laterally from the beam and there are slight traces of knife modification between the two tines. The principal interest of the piece lies, however, at the tine ends. Each has been neatly hollowed to provide a circular indentation. Both indentations are just over 4mm in diameter (Fig. 1).

This object can be identified as an antler stamp by comparison with similar examples from Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent. Earlier hand lists of Anglo-Saxon antler and bone stamps have been complemented by similar work in Europe (Evison 1979, 46–8; Briscoe 1981, 22–3; MacGregor 1985, 194; Riddler 1986; 1988; 1993, 115; Schmid 1980; Koch 1983, 496; Först 1984; Träger 1985, 174–8; Knaut 1987; Dijkman and Eryvnc 1998, 61; Struckmeyer 2011, 179–80). It should be noted at this point that these objects were originally described as stamps, but were then redefined as dies (Briscoe 1981, 2). However, the term ‘die’ has two quite separate meanings in artefact studies and confusion can occur between objects used for stamping and the singular form of the word dice. It is preferable, therefore, to return to an earlier terminology and to re-adopt the term ‘stamp’, as has been done in more recent literature (MacGregor 1985, 194; Riddler 1986; Hallén 1994,

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Figure 1. Antler stamp from Melbourne Street, *Hamwic* (SOU5).

216). The imprint made on a surface with an object of this type is therefore referred to here as a stamp impression.

Matthias Knaut has distinguished four principal groups of stamps, in providing a system based essentially on the raw materials used for their manufacture. Antler and bone stamps form Groups 1 and 2, ceramic stamps are represented in Group 3 and stamps of copper alloy are collected together in Group 4 (Knaut 1987, 467–70, abbn 5–8). Group 1 stamps were produced from the raw material with little or no modification, whilst those of Group 2 were modelled with some precision, often in order to allow both ends to be used in the stamping process. It is worth noting, however, that some of the objects of Groups 2 and 4, which appear in pairs within a small number of merovingian graves, are likely to be divination cylinders, rather than stamps (Funke 2006). The new stamp from Melbourne Street (Fig. 1) belongs to Group 1 and the form of its simple, circular impressions can be characterised as Briscoe type A1b (Briscoe 1981, 4). It is unusual for an antler crown (rather than a single tine) to be used and most stamps have only one design impressed on them. Here, however, both tine ends have been used and the impression is the same on both of them. A stamp of roe deer antler from West Stow, Suffolk also includes two tines, both of which could conceivably have been used for stamping, although only one is shaped to a specific pattern (West 1985, fig. 61.13) (Fig. 5d). In a similar manner, a red deer antler from Thetford, Norfolk retains two tines and it may have been used as a stamp, although it shows little modification from the original form of the antler (Riddler 2010, 83–4, fig. 36). A closer parallel for the use of both tines is provided by a roe deer antler stamp

from Møen in Denmark (Müller 1900, 187, fig. 5; Knaut 1987, abb 5.13).

Eight further stamps are known from *Hamwic*, all of which are also made of antler (Figs 2 and 6.A), and it has been suggested that antler was the preferred material for this purpose, both in England and in north-western Europe (Riddler 1986; 1993, 115; Först 1984, 19; Träger 1985, 177; Knaut 1987, 467). Experimental work has shown that bone stamps ‘gave by far the most efficient results, clearer impressions and less regular need for cleansing’ (Stokes 1984, 28). Antler stamps were not used by Stokes, unfortunately. Antler tine ends, in particular, provide areas of solid tissue suitable for a variety of stamped designs. Tine end stamps could be produced from the antlers of both red and roe deer. Roe deer antler occurs in small

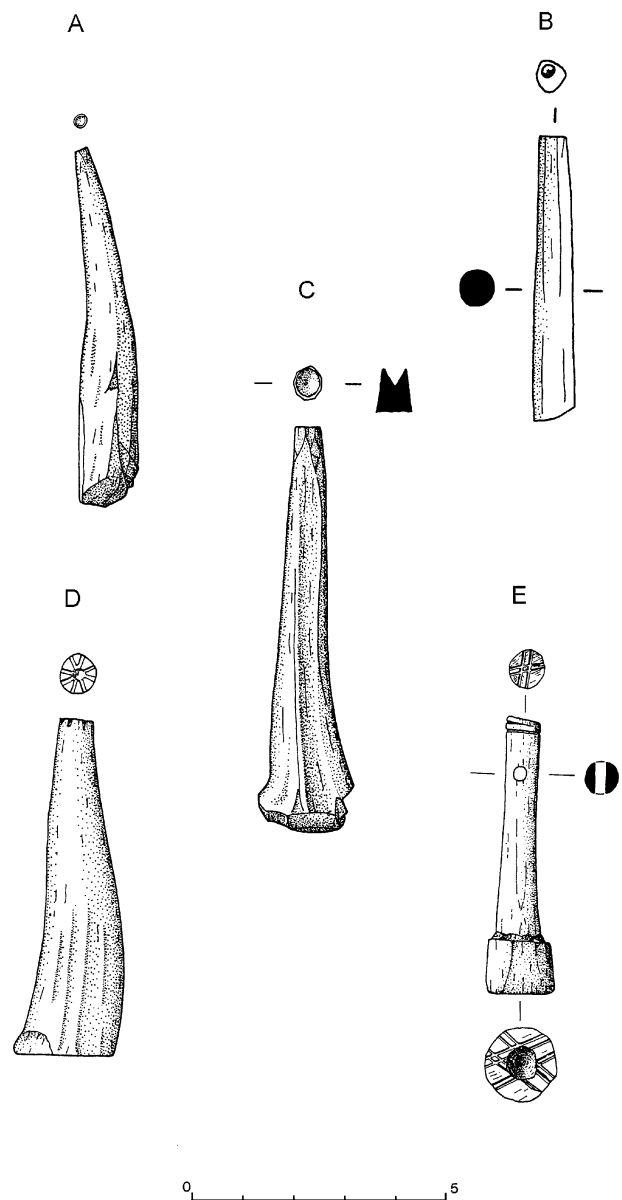


Figure 2. Antler stamps from *Hamwic*. A: Six Dials (SOU169), B: Cook Street (SOU254), C: Melbourne Street (SOU4), D: Six Dials (SOU169), E: Six Dials (SOU31).

quantities in early and middle Saxon contexts and stamps are one of the few items known to have been produced from this material (Riddler 1986, 18; 2003, 43).

Other stamps published recently include two early Anglo-Saxon examples of antler from Botolphs, Bramber, West Sussex, an antler stamp of a 6th century date from Daventry, Northamptonshire, a middle Saxon bone stamp from the monastery at Hartlepool, County Durham and an antler stamp from Cook Street, a site situated in the south-western part of *Hamwic* (Riddler 1990, 262, fig. 23.51–2; 1993, 115, fig. 10.11; Hylton 1996–7, 81, fig. 22.2; Daniels 1988, 197, fig. 37.2; 2007, 142, fig. 7.9.2). The early Anglo-Saxon pot stamp from Illington has now been fully published, as has the late Saxon antler stamp from Norwich Fishergate, whilst an antler stamp from Eriswell, Suffolk has been republished (Davison *et al.* 1993, 34, fig.44.166b; Ayers 1994, 29, fig. 17.4; West 1998, 32, fig.44.12). Anglo-Saxon antler stamps awaiting full publication include examples from Canterbury and Ipswich (Fig. 3). On the Continent, two examples from Feddersen Wierde, Germany have now been published, effectively doubling the number known from that settlement, and an example from Quentovic, France has been briefly mentioned

(Struckmeyer 2011, 179–80; Schmid 1980; Hill *et al.* 1990, fig. 3; Hill and Worthington 2010, 262).

Further afield to the north and west, four antler stamps are known from separate sites in northern Scotland, and within Ireland two examples have come from the monastery of Clonfad 3, Co. Westmeath (Fig. 4.A), and two from the early medieval settlement of Roestown 2, Co. Meath (Beveridge and Callander 1931–2, 59, fig. 15.4; Stevenson 1951–2, 189, fig. 2.5; MacGregor 1974, 78, fig. 10.144; 1985, 194; Ritchie 1971, 109, fig. 4.34; Hallén 1994, 216; Trzaska-Nartowski and Riddler 2012, 133 fig.8.10; Riddler and Trzaska-Nartowski 2009). The dominance of antler over bone as the raw material for Insular stamps has been emphasised previously (Riddler 1986, 17) and it continues; there are scarcely any stamps of bone.

In addition, there are several implements that may have been used as stamps, but for which the identification is a little uncertain. Nina Crummy has suggested that several tines from an early Anglo-Saxon deposit at Colchester, Essex may have served as pot stamps, and the Thetford implement also falls into this category (Crummy 1988, 88, fig. 98.3302, 3307; Riddler 2010, 83–4). A piece of antler from *Hamwic* has been published as a possible stamp but it appears merely to be a tine hollowed at its broad end (Every

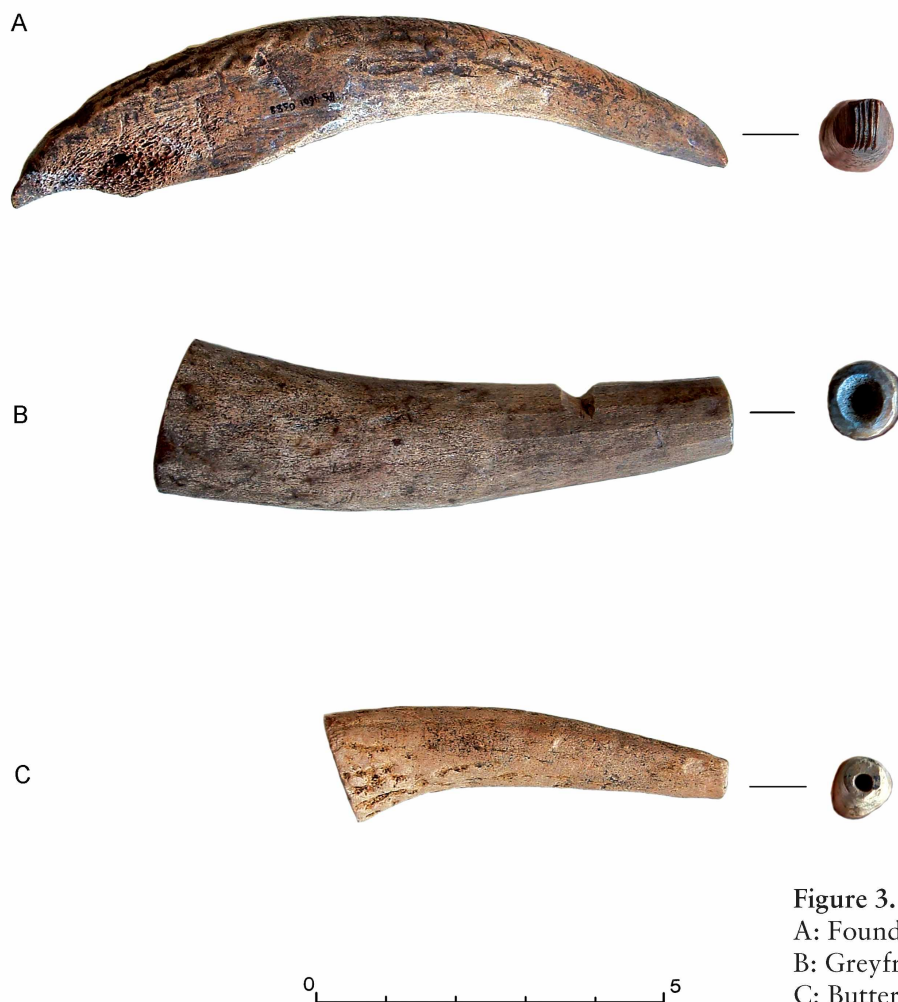


Figure 3. Antler stamps from Ipswich.
A: Foundation Street (IAS 4601),
B: Greyfriars Road (IAS 5203),
C: Buttermarket (IAS 3104).

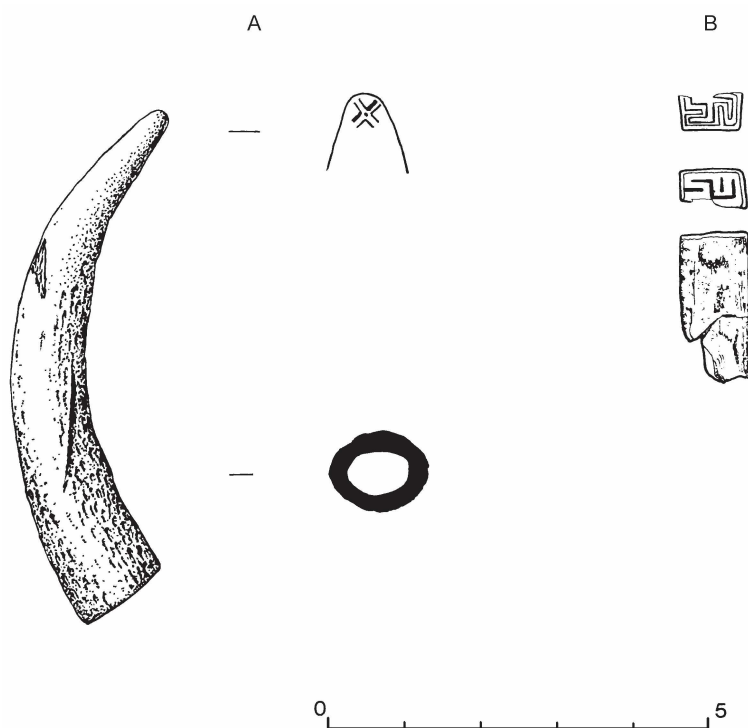


Figure 4. Stamps from Clonfad 3, Co. Westmeath, Ireland and Jarrow, A: Clonfad 3, B: Jarrow.

et al. 2005, 139, fig. 69.2). Briscoe (1979, 167–8 and pl XVI) suggested that a composite bone object was an intricate type of stamp, with which a number of different impressions could be made, but the object is actually a post-medieval bone implement handle.

Early Anglo-Saxon stamps and ceramics

It has generally been assumed that antler and bone stamps were used to decorate ceramics (Träger 1985, 177–8; Knaut 1987, 476; Arnold 1988, 344; Struckmeyer 2011, 180). This was implicit in Myres' description of the Illington/Lackford workshop, where a recently discovered antler stamp from West Stow was added to his discussion (Myres 1969, 133–4 and pl 8b; 1977, 61). However, a slightly later note by Myres (1970) revealed some of the emergent difficulties of aligning antler stamps with decorated ceramics. An antler stamp was described from Shakenoak in Oxfordshire, a site that produced no stamped ceramics, whilst a second example from Dùn an Fheurain, Gallanach, Lorn, Argyll came from completely the wrong part of the country and from another site with no stamped ceramics at all. Myres was led to 'suppose that it found its way to Argyll in the pocket of someone carried off in a Pictish or Scottish raid on the eastern Midlands in the 6th century' (Myres 1970), a suggestion accepted by MacGregor (1985, 194). Evison (1979, 46, fig 34.a) published another of the West Stow antler stamps and provided a useful handlist of Continental examples, which was subsequently updated by Knaut (1987). He experienced similar difficulties in correlating the Bopfingen stamp impressions with ceramics from the cemetery, where no links could be established

(Knaut 1987, 474). Donat echoed these sentiments in considering contemporary Slavic decorated ceramics and Koch could find no ceramics to match the impression on a bone stamp from Heuneberg an der Donau, Kreis Sigmaringen (Donat 1982, 266; Koch 1983, 497). For Träger, however, the lack of correlation was the exception, and not the rule (Träger 1985, 177).

Myres had confidently stated that the West Stow stamp, recovered as a surface find, was related to the Illington/Lackford workshop, but a more detailed study contradicted this assertion:

Several bone or antler stamps have been found in this part of East Anglia. Although some produce impressions similar to those on the Illington/Lackford vessels none could be shown to have been used by this workshop (Green *et al.* 1981, 190).

Even where a site produced both antler stamps and decorated ceramics, it could be difficult to link antler stamps precisely and unequivocally to particular impressions, because the impressions are reduced in size when the pot is fired and suffer thereafter from post-depositional processes. Some further difficulties were outlined in detailed studies of stamp impressions from the Illington/Lackford workshop. Experimental work by Stanley West with a bone stamp and fine potting clay led to observations that the appearance and size of an impression varied according to the depth and angle of the stamping, and the dryness of the clay also affected the depth of stamping that was possible. In addition, different fabrics shrunk to varying extents on firing, consequently affecting the size of an impression (Green *et al.* 1981, 190; *cf.* Arnold 1983,

19–21). Direct comparisons of size may not, therefore, be appropriate, but the stamps could still be viewed against the ceramic impressions from the same site in order to examine the range of forms that were in use, and general correspondences could be noted. It was also possible that an individual potter used a number of stamps impressed with the same design, but in different sizes. Arnold proposed this alternative for the Illington/Lackford workshop (Arnold 1988, 356). His comment on the Sancton/Baston assemblage of stamped ceramics is also of interest, in this respect:

With the vessels of the Sancton-Baston group it was found that if one of the more common stamp designs had been produced using a single stamp on a number of vessels, there was a tendency for all

of the other common designs on the vessels also to share the same stamps. In other words, the sets of stamps had been kept together and used on a number of potting occasions (Arnold 1988, 351–5).

This cohesiveness of stamp sets was not apparent with the Illington/Lackford workshop, however. Arnold (1988, 355) had earlier proposed that the five stamps used to provide impressions on the Sancton-Baston ceramics were moved between those settlements (Arnold 1983, 25). At West Stow five antler stamps were recovered (Fig. 5), which could be equated with 463 stamped sherds, including 150 of the Illington/Lackford workshop (Green *et al.* 1981; West 1985, 125, figs 21B.1; 61.13, fig. 14; 54.1, 2; Evison 1979, 46, fig. 34a; Myres 1969, 133 and pl. 8b). West

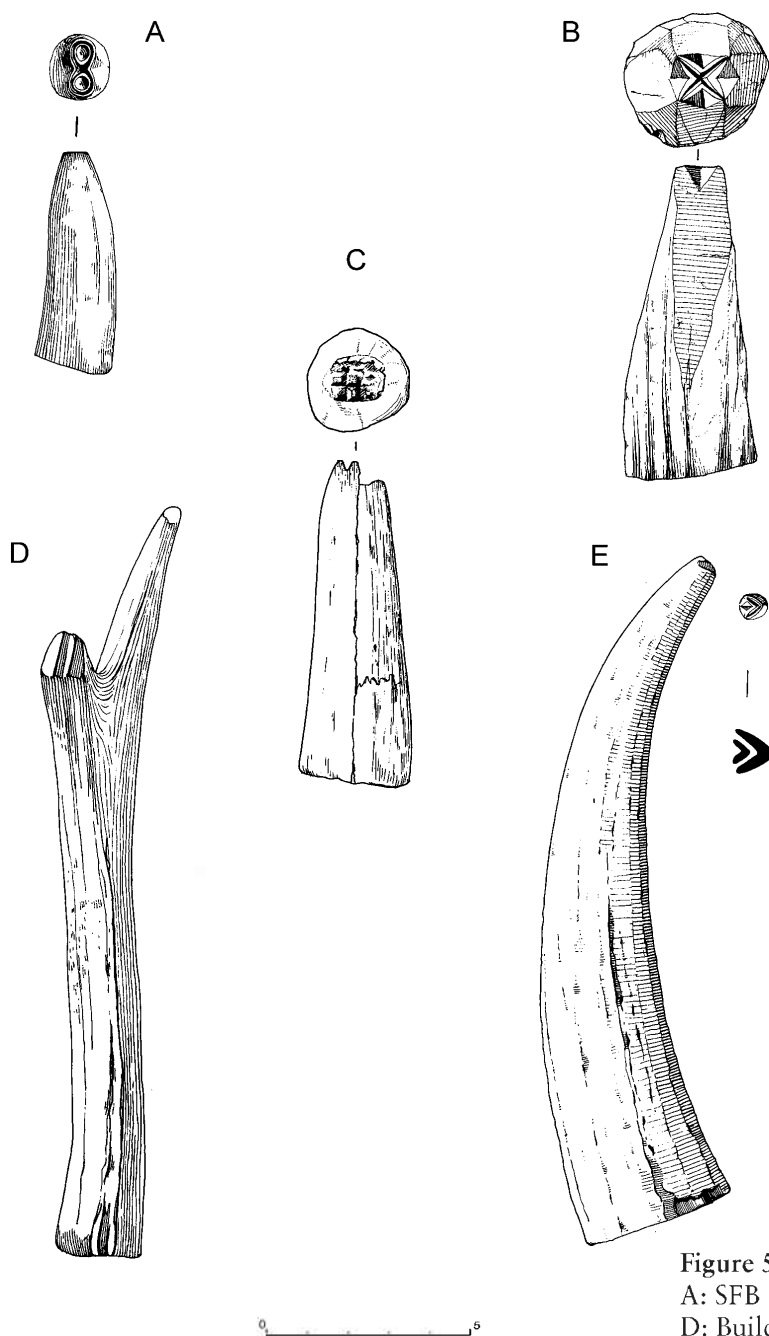


Figure 5. Antler stamps from West Stow, A: SFB 12, B: Unstratified, C: Layer 2, D: Building 7, E: SFB 12.

refers to four antler stamps from West Stow, but elsewhere in the excavation report five are described and illustrated (West 1985, 58). Here also, direct correlations of stamps and stamp impressions were not forthcoming, with the exception of one possible link (West 1985, 125, 135, figs 61.13, fig. 255.10). There is a general correspondence of design between two further stamps and stamp impressions from the site, whilst the two remaining stamps do not relate to the stamp impressions at all. One hundred and forty-five stamp impressions in ten groups (excluding the Illington/Lackford sherds) have no correspondence with any stamps from the site (West 1985, figs 292–4). Two of the West Stow antler stamps are unstratified, whilst two others came from the backfill of sunken featured building (SFB) 12, a structure whose fill was dated to the 6th century (West 1985, 149, table 63). The presence of two stamps in the same context echoes Arnold's suggestion that they may have been used in sets. The fifth stamp was associated with Hall 7, a structure originally dated to the mid 6th- to 7th century (*ibid*, 149, fig. 21b.1). Ipswich ware was found with this structure, however, suggesting that it actually belongs to the early- to mid-8th century, according to the latest dating for that ware (*ibid*, 137–8; Blinkhorn 2012, 3–8).

At Botolphs in Sussex the situation initially looked reasonably promising. The S-shaped design of one of the antler stamps was echoed on a number of early Anglo-Saxon sherds, but the ceramic stamps were noticeably larger than the stamp impression and a direct causal relationship could not be established between them, although there were undoubted links of form (Gardiner 1990, figs 17.9, 23.51). Three other stamp impressions occurred on sherds of several different fabrics, but the stamps that produced these have not been found (Gardiner 1990, fig. 17.6–8). Similarly, the Daventry antler stamp was not matched by any of the decorated ceramics from the site, even though the excavation produced the largest quantity of decorated sherds to be found in the county (Hylton 1996–7, 81). The antler stamp from Illington in Norfolk presented even greater problems, given its description: 'The stamp is type IIIb but has not yet been identified on any pot in the country' (Davison *et al.* 1993, 34). Elsewhere, it was related to ceramics from other Norfolk cemeteries, rather than to the site itself (Briscoe 1981, 22).

Difficulties remain in relating early Anglo-Saxon antler stamps to ceramics, but both Sutton Courtenay and West Stow excavations revealed trial pieces of clay into which stamps had been impressed. Leeds described and illustrated 'a flattish piece of dried, but unbaked, clay [which] seems to bear traces of the impress of wooden stamps, such as were used on the vases themselves' (Leeds 1923, 174 and pl XXIV, fig. 2E and F). Little detail has been provided of the West Stow trial piece, although it is known to have been fired (West 1985, 64, fig. 254.3). The general

assumption that these early Anglo-Saxon stamps were used to impress ceramics is clearly strengthened by the discovery of these trial pieces of clay, and it is endorsed also by the experimental work of Stokes (1984). Accordingly, antler stamps of 5th- to 6th century date may well have been used on ceramics, even though the correspondences of the stamps and the ceramic stamp impressions are more general than specific.

Briscoe (1981, 22–3) provided the first catalogue of antler stamps from Anglo-Saxon England, which was subsequently enlarged and amended (MacGregor 1985, 194; Riddler 1986, 18). By the mid 1980's it had become clear, however, that there was no simple and obvious correlation between antler and bone stamps and ceramic stamp impressions. In publishing the antler stamp from the Broch of Burrian, MacGregor (1974, 78) had suggested that it might have been used for stamping leather, and similar conclusions had been reached for implements from Lund (Wahlöö 1972). The emerging sequence of antler stamps from middle Saxon settlements was also leading away from ceramics, and towards leather.

Middle and late Saxon antler stamps

When Lady Teresa Briscoe was compiling her handlist of twelve antler stamps, there were just two examples from *Hamwic*, with the Shakenoak stamp increasing the middle Saxon number to three, a quarter of the overall total. Subsequent decades have seen a complete reversal of the ratio of early Anglo-Saxon to middle Saxon antler stamps. There are now nineteen middle or late Saxon examples, against eleven of early Anglo-Saxon date. They are known from *Hamwic*, Hartlepool, Jarrow and Shakenoak, and there are examples from late Saxon contexts at Ipswich and Fishergate, Norwich. As noted above, one of the West Stow stamps can also be described as middle Saxon, having emerged from a structure dated by the presence of Ipswich ware. The eleven antler stamps assigned to the early Anglo-Saxon period are almost equalled now by the series from *Hamwic* alone. Addyman and Hill (1969, 72) referred to an antler or bone stamp from a site to the north-east of St Mary's church (SOU33) at *Hamwic*; the stamp is now missing, unfortunately. A little later Hodges (1981, 13) was able to mention two antler stamps from *Hamwic* and he illustrated the Melbourne Street example, but by the time of Timby's report on the middle Saxon pottery from *Hamwic*, the number had risen to seven (Hodges 1981, 13, fig. 2.5.8; Riddler 1986, Table 1; 1988; Timby 1988, 106–8) and it now stands at nine (Figs 2 and 6.A). Five of the stamps come from two sites (SOU 31 and 169) at Six Dials in northern *Hamwic* and the remainder have been found in southern *Hamwic*, either in the Melbourne Street area (SOU 4 and 5), to the north of St Mary's church (SOU33) or to the west of the church (SOU254). Little can be said about the lost stamp from SOU33, beyond a description of a 4mm circular

impression with a cross motif (Addyman and Hill 1969, 72). All of the remaining stamps are made of antler. The SOU4 stamp has been cut from the beam of a roe deer antler, whilst the others are from red deer antler tines. They provide the overall impression of being longer and more slender than most of the West Stow examples (Fig. 5). The nine *Hamwic* stamps dominate the middle Saxon assemblage, although there are now five stamps from four separate sites in Ipswich, some of which are published here for the first time (Fig. 3). Two of the Ipswich antler stamps come from an early Anglo-Saxon site at Handford Road, whilst the others, shown in Fig. 3, were recovered from excavations within the middle and late Saxon town (Riddler *et al.* forthcoming).

Stamped ceramic vessels first occur in *Hamwic* around the late 8th to early 9th century and this form of decoration is mostly confined to vessels of fabric groups II (chalk-tempered), III (sandy wares), IV (mixed-grit wares) and VII (calcite wares) (Timby 1988, 106). The stamps used on group VII vessels differ markedly from those of the other fabric groups. Addyman and Hill related the decorated middle Saxon sherds in local fabrics directly to those imported into the settlement, whilst Hodges emphasised an apparent continuity in tradition from the early Anglo-Saxon period (Addyman and Hill 1969, 84; Hodges 1981, 11). Such continuity is less likely, however, now that it is clear that the advent of pot stamping at

Hamwic lay in the mid- to late phases of middle Saxon occupation there, and not in the earlier phases. During the intervening century or more, ceramic vessels were not stamped. The contexts from which the stamps themselves were recovered confirm this late dating. Feature [8861] on SOU169 produced a stamp in a pit layer; the pit was phased to Mid+ *Hamwic* (c. 750–850 or a little later). The same dating can be applied to the example from Cook Street (SOU254). Feature [5238] from SOU31 also provided an antler stamp (Sf 2087). This is one of the latest pits from Six Dials, probably dating to after c. 850 (Bourdillon 2003, 49–50). The other *Hamwic* stamps are unstratified or come from contexts that cannot be closely dated.

One of the *Hamwic* stamps (SOU169, sf <2411>) has been sawn diagonally across the upper end and includes a series of parallel saw cuts set into the surface, providing a comb-like appearance (Fig. 6.A). This form of decoration is repeated on stamps from Canterbury, Hartlepool, Ipswich, Norwich and *Sandtun*, as well as more distant examples from the Broch of Burrian and Roestown 2 (MacGregor 1974, fig. 10.145; Riddler 1986, 19, fig. 2; 2001, 245; Watkins 1991, 71; Timby 1988, fig. 18.2; Riddler *et al.* forthcoming; Ayers 1994, fig. 17.4) (Fig. 6). The English examples are all middle or late Saxon stamps. The antler stamp from the Broch of Burrian is unstratified, whilst the Roestown 2 stamp came from the fill of a ditch cut in Phase 2 of the site,

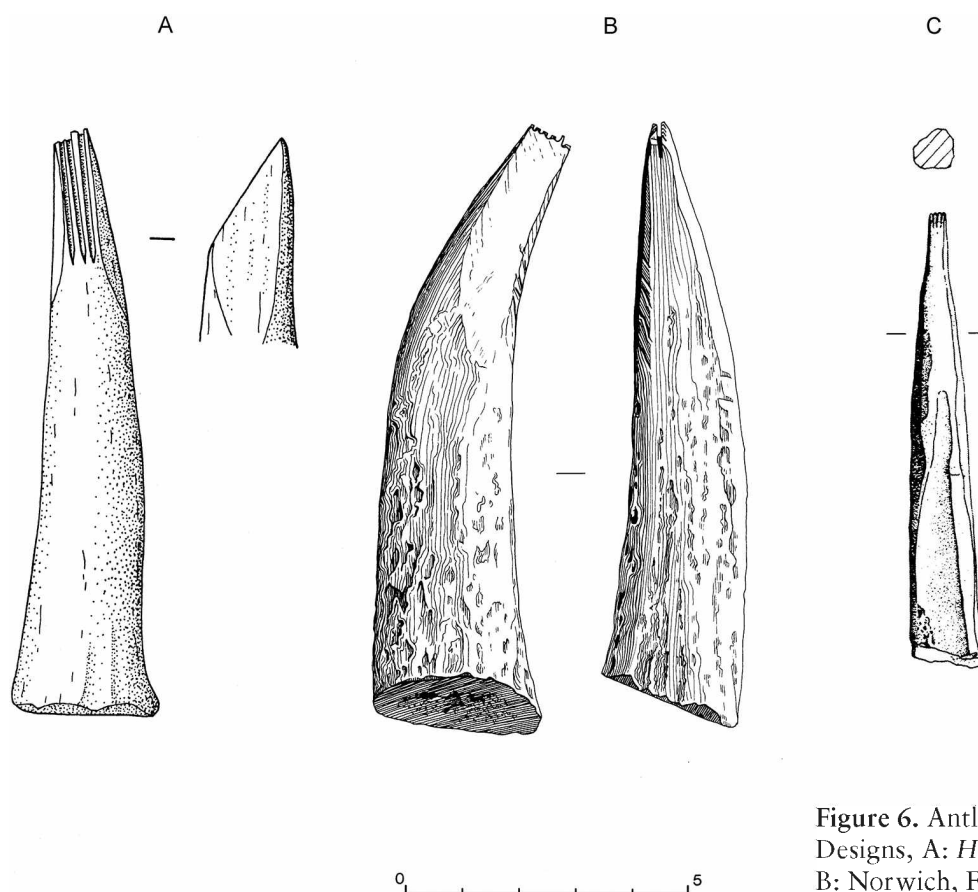


Figure 6. Antler stamps with Combed Designs, A: *Hamwic*, Six Dials (SOU31), B: Norwich, Fishergate, C: Hartlepool.

probably in the 8th or 9th century, or possibly a little later (O'Hara 2009, 71 and 75; Riddler and Trzaska-Nartowski 2009). Antler stamps with combed designs do not occur in the early Anglo-Saxon period, where the emphasis lies more with impressed stamps, rather than those suitable for surface decoration, even though linear designs are common on the ceramics of the period. These antler stamps were clearly used to score a sequence of grooves on to a soft, resistant surface, and they could provide straight or undulating patterns. In some cases, the end could also be used for comb point designs. They follow a tradition of comb-like devices known from late Neolithic and Bronze Age contexts in particular, although they differ from these implements for the cutting of grooves into each stamp, rather than the shaping of comb teeth (Cleal 1992; Clarke 1970, 10, fig. 1).

Were the nine *Hamwic* antler stamps and their middle Saxon correlates actually used to stamp ceramics? The surviving stamps from *Hamwic* contrast noticeably with the evidence from the stamped ceramics in a number of ways (Timby 1988, 118, figs. 17–18). Indeed, no single example can be conclusively related to the stamped decoration of ceramics from the settlement. Only the Melbourne Street and Cook Street stamps, which merely have simple circular indentations, recall the assemblage of ceramic stamps from *Hamwic* published by Timby (1988, fig. 17), and no direct links between these stamps and the stamp impressions have yet been made. It has already been noted that the Shakenoak antler stamp could not be related to any stamped ceramics from the settlement. Arguably the greatest difficulty in reconciling a stamp with ceramic evidence lies with the Hartlepool example, however. It was originally described as a pot stamp, but there is an apparent conflict between this interpretation and the later estimate that 'as far as can be determined the Anglo-Saxon contexts were aceramic' (Daniels 1988, 195, fig. 37.2; 1990, 383). A few pre-Conquest sherds were found in medieval contexts at Hartlepool, but none of these carry stamped decoration (Daniels 1990, 379). Subsequently the object was described as a decorating tool: 'The closest parallel to this comes from potters' tools, but in the absence of decorated pottery from Hartlepool the actual use of this object remains conjectural' (Daniels 2007, 142). The quantity of Anglo-Saxon ceramics from Hartlepool has increased slightly, but decorated sherds are still absent (*ibid.*, 127–9).

Two further stamps also emphasise this movement away from an association with ceramics alone. The elaborate antler stamp from Jarrow has suffered from the effects of burning, but the intricate pattern of its surviving end is clearly visible (MacGregor 1985, 194, fig. 104e; Riddler 2006, 267, 275, fig. 31.5.3.WB24) (Fig. 4.B). This pattern has nothing at all in common with early Anglo-Saxon stamp impressions (Green *et al.* 1981, figs 2–3; Briscoe 1981, 4–20) and it can be compared instead with Hiberno-

Saxon imagery. In this respect, it is paralleled by a copper alloy stamp from Swanley in Kent, which is thought to have been used to stamp leather book covers (Kendrick *et al.* 1956–60, 86–7; Wilson 1961, 214 and pl XXXVIIIb).

Stamps, leather and loomweights

By the middle Saxon period the requirement to stamp ceramics had changed and it may well be that *Hamwic* and settlement sites of the North Sea littoral hold the key to the functional interpretation of middle Saxon antler stamps. Excavations at St Mary's Stadium revealed an inhumation cemetery of 7th- to early 8th century date. A *seax* from Grave [5352] within the cemetery was retained within a leather sheath, and that sheath had been both embossed and stamped (Cameron 2005, 61–2, fig. 32). The revived technology of vegetable tanning, originally of Roman origin, allowed the leather to be decorated with techniques that include stamping. It is difficult to underestimate the significance of this *seax* cover because it indicates that leather was being stamped in the early phases of settlement activity at *Hamwic*. The *seax* may, of course, be of Continental origin, but at the very least it suggests that a new technology was present in the middle Saxon settlement and was probably in operation there by the 8th to 9th century, the date at which vegetable tanning is thought to have been revived in Britain (Cameron 2000, 70–7; 2008, 10–11). It may be no coincidence that it is around this time that leather comes into use as a covering material set over wood on the grips of Continental swords (Geibig 1991, 101), although no decorated examples of these leather-covered grips have yet been found. The antler stamps from *Hamwic*, which emerge from *c.* 750–800 onwards, seem to tie in well with this re-emergent technology although, as noted above, it is also the point in time at which stamped ceramics emerge at the settlement. The 8th-century leather binding of *Codex Bonifatianus I* is also stamped (Wilson 1961, 205 fig. 3; Cameron and Mould 2011, 103–4). Wilson (1961, 213–5) has argued that the binding was made in Northumbria, perhaps in the first half of the 8th century. It is conceivable therefore that there is some form of link between contemporary stamped ceramics and stamped leather, much as there is a correlation between stamped ceramics and loomweights.

Three types of Anglo-Saxon loomweight are known, which can be described as annular, intermediate and bun-shaped (Hurst 1959, 23–5; Riddler 2004, 19; Walton Rogers 2007, 30–2). Annular loomweights occur in early Anglo-Saxon contexts of 5th- to 6th-century date and the earliest intermediate loomweights go back to the 6th century, although they are not common before the 7th century (Riddler 2004, 19). Bun-shaped loomweights are found in contexts of the 8th century onwards (Walton Rogers 2007, 30).

Annular loomweights are not stamped but stamped impressions are found on intermediate and bun-shaped loomweights. It is essentially a feature, therefore, of the middle Saxon period. Walton Rogers (2009, 228) has discussed the stamping of intermediate and bun-shaped loomweights from Flixborough, suggesting that the practice is characteristic of sites of some status, and citing examples from Birka, Dorestad, Haithabu and Ribe. The Flixborough loomweights are mostly decorated with sequences of impressed dots, arranged in rows and other patterns, although stamped designs also occur (*ibid*, Figs 9.10–9.12). Decorated loomweights are a little more common than she has suggested, extending to rural settlements on the Continent, as well as to other sites in Anglo-Saxon England.

Continental sites with decorated loomweights are distributed across Frisia, southern Scandinavia and the north-western part of the Slavic area, including the south settlement at Haithabu, Kosel, Hessens and Elisenhof (Steuer 1974, 119; Meier 1994, 187–8; Siegmüller 2010, 111–112; Westphalen 1999, 55–9). The large sample from Elisenhof, where no less than 119 of the 466 loomweights are decorated, includes the use of stamps, as well as comb point impressions (not necessarily made by combs, although this is likely for the longer lines of indentations), single marks made by a pointed implement, circular indentations probably made by bone needle cases and impressions left in the clay by metal keys. Petra Westphalen has noted that the objects used to impress designs on loomweights are firmly associated with women (*ibid*, 56–8, tafn 8–11). Briscoe had previously described the use of brooches to provide stamp impressions on early Anglo-Saxon ceramics (Briscoe 1985). It raises the interesting question of whether antler stamps were also produced, retained and used by women, given that stamp impressions are reasonably common on these loomweights. The only inhumation grave to have produced an antler stamp, within the cemetery at Bopfingen, Ostalbkreis, contained the skeleton of a female, aged 40–50 (Knaut 1987, 463–4). Antler stamps have also come from cremation graves at Altenbülstedt, Kr. Bremervörde, Bliedersdorf, Kr. Stade and Westerwanna, Kr. Land Hadeln, burials for which no details of their human remains survive, unfortunately (Knaut 1987, 468 note 14).

The purpose of decorative impressions on loomweights is unclear. Meier has suggested that the marks applied to loomweights from Kosel signified different weights to apply either to specific groups of warp threads, or to particular looms, but they could equally well have social or religious connotations (Meier 1994, 188; Hamerow 1993, 68; Westphalen 1999, 58–9; Goffin 2003, 221). In general, a warp-weighted loom would require a sequence of ceramic loomweights of similar weights, although the end weights may have been heavier than the remainder, so that only a minority of weights might need to be

marked (Riddler 2004, 21). Other Anglo-Saxon decorated loomweights include examples from *Hamwic* and *Lundenwic*, as well as rural settlements at Maidenhead, Old Erringham and Ramsbury (Every *et al.* 2005, 138; Goffin 2003, 221; Foreman *et al.* 2002, 68; Holden 1976, fig. 3.1–2; Haslam 1980, fig. 19.3). Comb point decoration can be seen on a loomweight from West Stow (West 1985, fig. 297.14). These loomweights are largely decorated with indentations or comb point lines and stamped impressions are rare, but are not unknown.

Conclusion

The sequence of middle Saxon antler stamps, which now outnumber the early Anglo-Saxon examples in a ratio of almost 2:1, emerge alongside a technology that would have allowed them to be utilised on leather, and at a point when stamping was also being applied once again to ceramics, and also to loomweights. Previously there have been just two explanations for the possible function of antler stamps, as implements stamping either ceramics or leather, and these two alternatives have been set against each other. It is now becoming clearer that during the latter part of the middle Saxon period, from *c.* 750–800 onwards, antler stamps were used to provide impressions on a variety of materials and, following the evidence accumulating from the Continent, they may have been the possessions of women.

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Résumé

Une réévaluation des déchets de bois de cerf et d'os de Melbourne Street à Southampton a révélé un timbre de bois de cerf ayant des indentations circulaires à deux andouillers. Des timbres de bois de cerf avec des doubles pointes sont également connus de West Stow et de Møen au Danemark. Au cours du début de la période anglo-saxonne, il est possible que des timbres aient été utilisés pour décorer des céramiques, bien que seulement quelques comparaisons directes puissent être faites entre les timbres et les impressions de timbre, et la corrélation entre eux est générale et non spécifique. Le nombre de timbres de bois de cerf a augmenté considérablement dans les dernières décennies. Il y a maintenant neuf timbres de Hamwic et dix d'autres sites de la période Moyenne Saxonne et de la fin de la période saxonne. Ceux-ci sont comparés avec seulement dix sites qui datent du début de la période anglo-saxonne. Il y a peu de corrélation entre les timbres et les céramiques timbrées de la période Moyenne Saxonne et de la fin de la période, et il est plus probable que ces timbres ont été utilisés pour gaufrer le cuir qui avait été tanné avec des légumes. Au cours de la période Moyenne Saxonne, des timbres de bois de cerf étaient utilisés aussi, ainsi que d'autres instruments, pour produire des impressions sur des poids des métiers à tisser, et il existe une forte corrélation avec des objets utilisés par les femmes. Ceci offre la possibilité que les timbres eux-mêmes étaient la possession de femmes.

Zusammenfassung

Eine Neubewertung der Geweih- und Knochenreste aus der Melbourne Street in Southampton offenbart einen Geweihstempel mit kreisförmigen Abdrücken auf zwei der Sprossen. Doppelzackige Geweihstempel sind auch aus West Stow und aus Møen in Dänemark bekannt. Während der frühen angelsächsischen Periode wurden Geweihstempel womöglich zur Keramikdekoration benutzt. Allerdings können nur wenige direkte Vergleiche

zwischen Stempel und Stempelabdruck angestellt werden, und die Übereinstimmung zwischen beiden ist eher allgemein als spezifisch. In den letzten Jahrzehnten ist die Anzahl an Geweihstempeln deutlich gestiegen. Es gibt nun neun Stempel aus Hamwic und zehn aus anderen mittel- und spätsächsischen Stätten, im Vergleich zu nur zehn aus frühen angelsächsischen Stätten. Es gibt wenig Übereinstimmung zwischen Stempeln und geprägter Keramik aus den mittel- und spätsächsischen Perioden. Es ist wahrscheinlicher, dass diese Stempel dazu benutzt wurden, pflanzlich gegärbtes Leder zu prägen. Neben anderen Utensilien wurden Geweihstempel während der mittelsächsischen Periode dazu benutzt, um auf Webgewichten Abdrücke zu erzeugen. Dabei herrscht eine starke Übereinstimmung mit solchen Gegenständen, die von Frauen benutzt wurden. Möglicherweise waren daher die Stempel selbst im Besitz von Frauen.

