

AN IRON AGE COMB FROM STANTON LOW

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This note records the discovery made by Mr. J. J. Phillips of New Bradwell of an antler comb of a type which belongs to the pre-Roman Iron Age in the gravel quarries at Stanton Low, North Bucks.¹ It was found 'some years ago' and unfortunately the precise find-spot is not recorded. It is now in the possession of the County Museum, Aylesbury.² (Fig. 1). Although excavation has produced evidence of Iron Age occupation at Stanton Low³ there are no known associations for this comb.

The precise function of implements of this type is a matter of dispute; even though they are commonly known as 'weaving combs', it seems likely that this is a misnomer. Although they have frequently been found on Iron Age sites, it is at present the only recorded example from Buckinghamshire.

It is made from red deer antler and is in a fairly good state of preservation. The total length is 130 mm. and three of the original ten teeth are still complete. The handle is flat in cross-section and has a maximum thickness of 9.5 mm. The longitudinal section is slightly curved and most of the cancellous tissue on the back of the handle (rougher material from the centre of the beam of the original antler), has been cut away. It is very worn and polished on the butt, especially at the points where the decoration is missing. The teeth and the decoration on the handle appear to have been cut with a knife, and the ring-and-dot ornament on the butt has been executed with a compass.

The teeth are generally well worn and polished by use, and on the back of them there are faint lateral striations which give an indication of the manner in which the comb was used. Wear of this nature has been noted before,⁴ and whilst it would be out of place to discuss the evidence in detail here, it would seem more likely that it resulted from a carding process than being caused by pushing the weft into position on a warp-weighted upright loom, which the identification as 'weaving-combs' presupposes.⁵

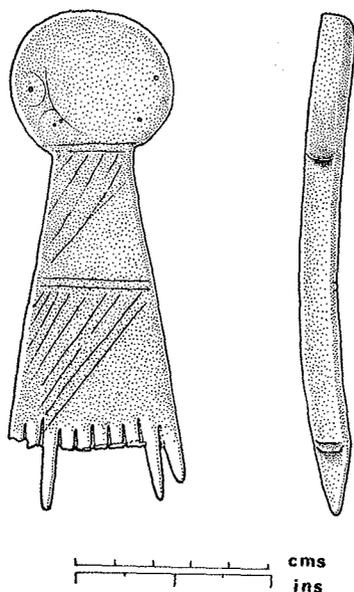


Fig. 1. Iron Age comb from Stanton Low. ($\frac{1}{2}$)

This comb from Stanton Low belongs to Type 2 of the Bulleid and Gray classification, 'those with an oval or rounded enlargement at the handle end'.⁶ Although none of the types in this classification (a classification which is based solely upon the form of the butt), have yet been shown to have any specific dating or geographical distribution, it would appear that a fairly large proportion of the known combs from the neighbouring counties of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire belong either to this type, no. 2, or to Type 3 which have an enlarged or squared butt.

¹ Stanton Low farm (now demolished), N.G.R. SP 839427.

² Accessions No. 253.68. Also from the quarries is an antler tube 50 mm. long and decorated with incised lines, Acc. No. 254.68. It is not closely dateable and was found without any recorded associations. I should like to thank Mr. C. Gowing, Curator of the County Museum, for the facilities which were made available to study these objects.

³ M. U. Jones, 'Excavations at Stanton Low, in the upper Ouse valley, during March, 1957'. *Records of Bucks.*, 16 (1957-8), 198-215.

⁴ R. Bulleid and H. St. G. Gray, *Glastonbury Lake Village*, I, 1911, 272.

⁵ For a discussion of the processes involved, based upon observations of this type of loom being used in modern times in Norway, see M. Hoffmann, *The Warp-Weighted Loom*, *Studia Archaeologica* No. 14, Oslo, 1964.

⁶ Bulleid and Gray, *op. cit.*, 274-6.