



### The Romsey Stylus

David Hinton and Tim Pestell have both confirmed that the Romsey stylus is Anglo-Saxon. It dates from the 8th or 9th century. In his article 'Flixborough Revisited' (ASSAH 17, 2011) John Blair discusses the association of Anglo-Saxon styli with ecclesiastical settlements. Given their absence from secular sites I think it is reasonable to regard the Romsey stylus as evidence that there was a mid-Saxon minster here.

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almost certainly eighth-century. Tim Pestell's account of them here builds on his earlier work, and pursues an on-going debate.<sup>15</sup> While acknowledging the well-attested use of wax tablets and styli in the early middle ages for monastic, scholastic and other ecclesiastical activities, his concern is to stress potential secular uses in accountancy or estate management. This is not a place for dogmatism: styli *could* have had such functions in the mid-Saxon world as they did in the Roman one, and much of what we have recently learnt about that world should remind us how much we still do not know. We must, however, keep a sense of proportion, and remember that while the ecclesiastical uses are well documented there is still not a shred of evidence for the secular ones. With such a large group of styli, some of them notably opulent, the balance of probability surely remains with the ecclesiastical option. The fact that a high proportion of stylus-bearing sites – mostly in eastern England – are not documented as monastic tells us nothing, since it is almost certain that most mid-Saxon minsters in eastern England are undocumented. It remains a serious problem for the secular account-keeping argument that no styli, with one exception, have been found in the commercial emporia of mid-Saxon England. (As for that exception, readers must judge for themselves whether the 'unsexable, adolescent individual' buried in an Ipswich cemetery with a pouch containing a stylus is plausibly identified as a 'book-keeper'<sup>16</sup> – an adolescent one? – rather than, for instance, the child of a merchant being educated in some local minster but buried near his/her family.) The styli from Winchester and York do not help here, since those places of course contained major religious communities.

GRID REF	SITE AREA	SITE CODE	CONTEXT NO.						
	TRENCH 3	NL/79	16 3016						
CATEGORY	Layer artificially created (to phase out contamination)								
LENGTH	WIDTH	DEPTH							
LEVEL: TOP	BOTTOM								
S	MATRIX COLOUR: Black brown								
Ø	MATRIX TEXTURE: Fine soil								
I	MATRIX CONSISTENCE:								
L	COARSE COMPONENTS:								
STRUCTURES	MATRIX:								
COMPONENTS:									
DESCRIPTIVE NOTES:	Containing brick pottery bone & tile. Slag & tile very evident and a noticeable change in the type of slag at top of layer & bottom*								
PART OF:	CONSISTS OF:								
FILL OF:	FILLED BY:								
ABOVE:	CUTS:								
BELOW: (5)	CUT BY:								
BUTTS:	BUTTED BY:	BONDED TO:							
SAME AS:	PROVISIONAL DATE: Iron-working phase								
INTERPRETIVE COMMENTS:	* Fine soil with low gravel content which increases towards the bottom of the layer and gravel beneath. Root disturbance. Post med disturbance on W side of trench.								
EXCAVATION METHOD:									
COLLECTION OF FINDS:	GOOD	FAIR	POOR						
PRESENT BUT NOT COLLECTED, WHY?									
CONTAMINATION:	LOW	FAIR	HIGH						
PLAN NO:	SECTION NO:	PHOTO'S (C):	(M):						
OTHER DRAWINGS:									
FINDS	BRICK	DAUB	SLAG	WOOD	SHELL				
POT	PLASTER	STONE	IRON	LEATHER	METAL				
TILE	MORTAR	GLASS	BRONZE	BONE	FLINT				
ARCH. OBJECT NO:									
SAMPLES	NO	TYPE	QTY	NO	TYPE	QTY	NO	TYPE	QTY

The Newton Lane excavation notes say that the stylus was found in Context 3016. The context was provisionally dated to the 'Iron-working phase', not surprising given the presence of slag. The description includes the interesting comment on 'a noticeable change in the type of slag at top of layer and bottom'. This shows that these deposits were not subject to later disturbance - the different slag types would have been intermixed. It is unfortunate that the location of the stylus within the layer was not recorded. It is very unlikely to have been introduced as part of the post-medieval disturbance on the western side of the trench. Therefore it was probably associated with the slag deposits.



