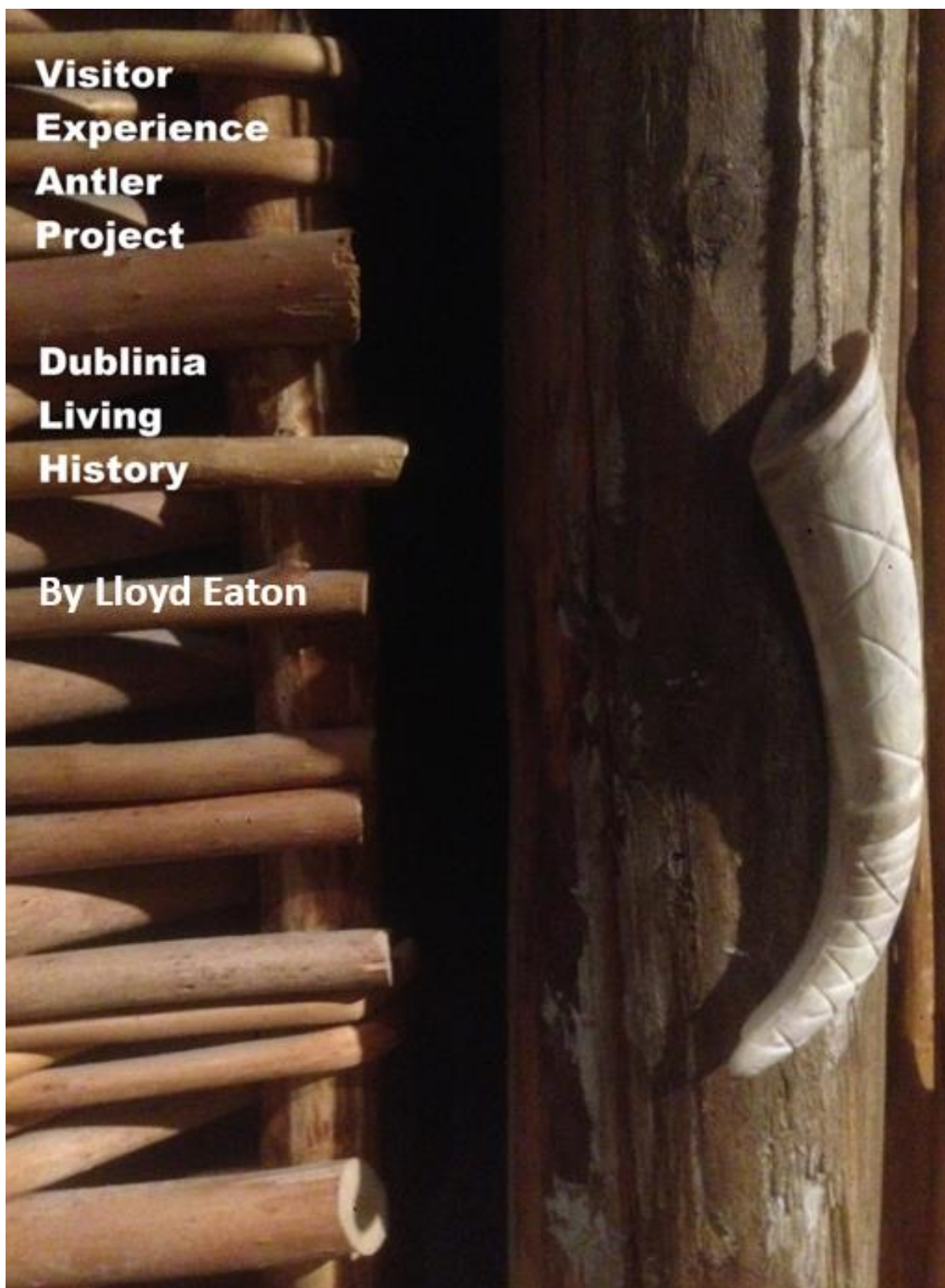


**Visitor  
Experience  
Antler  
Project**

**Dublinia  
Living  
History**

**By Lloyd Eaton**



## **Introduction**

This report has been prepared to present the results of the first object reconstructed as part of the 'Visitor Experience Antler Project' (VEAP) by Lloyd Eaton. The VEAP projects core objective is to create accurate reconstructions of objects discovered during archaeological excavations in Dublin dating to the Viking period. These replicas are created using authentic techniques, methods and tools which would have been available to people living in the past. These replicas will form part of the handling collection and provide the visitor a tangible link to Dublin's rich heritage.

This project has been created as part of the living history undertaken by staff at Dublinia. Dublinia is located in Synod Hall on Saint Michaels Hill Dublin. The museum is dedicated to telling the story of Viking and Medieval Dublin through a variety of interpretive ways such as immersive exhibitions, guided tours and our talented living history team. Dublinia is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Medieval Trust. The Medieval Trust is a not for profit registered charity (registered charity no.20024611) and company limited by guarantee established for education and research purposes.

The antler used was kindly donated to Dublinia by the OPW team from Phoenix park on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2021. This antler was collected by the park rangers during the annual shed, this was important for us as we wanted ensure the antler used in this project was ethically sourced. We would like to say a special thanks to Raychel Coyle and Terry Moore from the OPW for helping to source the antler and therefore allowing this project to be possible.

## Production process

The first object chosen to be recreated as part of the project was the 'Decorated pendant container, E1412598'. This object was discovered on Fishamble street and is made out of an antler tine which has been hollowed out and has a small perforation at the top. It contains geometric designs and is currently on display in the National Museum of Ireland, Kildare street.



Figure 1: *Decorated pendant container, E1412598* (Wallace 2016, 301)

**Step 1:**

In order to prepare a suitable work surface, it was decided that two bolts would be needed to hold the antler in place while sawing. These were based on the conventional use of clenche bolts used to hold planking in place on Dublinia's Skuldelev 2 ship reconstruction. See Bill et al (2007, p.23)



Figure 2: *Work surface*



Figure 3: *Example of bolts used in the reconstruction of the Dublinia's Skuldelev 2 ship.*

**Step 2:**

The antler tine was sawed off from the beam using a hacksaw based on one found in the Mastermyr tool chest dating between 793–1066 AD found in Gotland Sweden.



*Figure 4: Sawing in process*



*Figure 5: The tine before soaking in water.*

**Step 3:**

After being soaked for two days in room cold water the antler was shaved carefully with a gouge in preparation for carving.



*Figure 6: The tine being shaved with a gouge*



*Figure 7: The shaved tine*

**Step 4:**

The end of the tine was cut at roughly a 45° angle using a hacksaw.



*Figure 8: Cutting the top angle*

**Step 5:**

The marrow was carefully extracted using an awl.



*Figure 9: Marrow extraction in process*

**Step 6:**

Once the marrow was extracted the spine ridge is marked out with the gouge



*Figure 10: Marking out the spine ridge with a gouge*



*Figure 11: Using the rasp saw to further define the spine*



*Figure 12. The top panel ready for decoration. The bottom panel is shown with central horizontal line made with the Mastermyr saw and defined with Mastermyr dog leg rasp*



**Step 7:**

The geometric motifs of lozenges and lattice patterns were carefully created using the Mastermyr saw.



Figure 13: Marking out the motifs with the *Mastermyr* saw

**Step 8:**

Finally the perforation was added by using a stylus awl.



Figure 14: Perforation in process

Scale Photographs

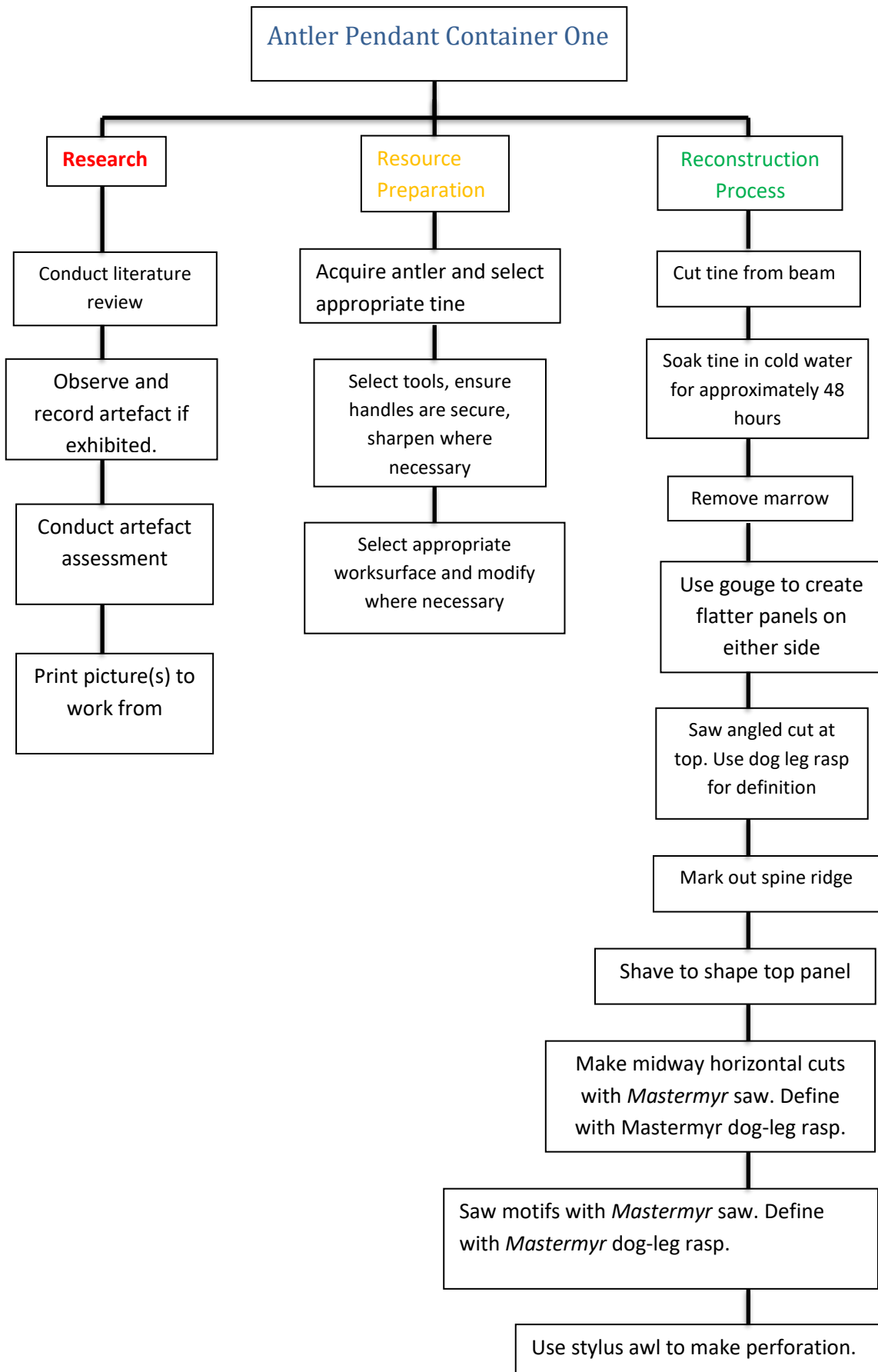


**Tools Summary**



<b>Some details of tools used</b>	
1	Mastermyr tool chest hacksaw (catalogue number 36)
2	Rasp, based on find 14876, Bedern excavation, York. Dated 1100-1500 AD. Used to simulate Mastermyr tool chest file (catalogue number 25)
3	Small knife made by author. Modelled on 'Iron knife, Christchurch Place.' Exhibited at National Museum of Ireland, Kildare Street.
4	Scorp/ spoon gouge (blade broken). For discussion see Riley (2017, p.12)
5	Stylus type awl
6	Full tang belt knife
7	Mastermyr dog leg rasp (catalogue number 37).

## Work Break down Structure – VEAP – L. Eaton



### **Personal experience during the reconstruction**

What interests me about this object is that it is such a unique expression of someone's individual taste and that someone has invested time in its production.

The upper part of the tine is divided into two panels separated by a ridge with different motifs on each side which gives the object balanced proportions. Whilst reconstructing this piece, more than once I thought that maybe the original was made by someone who simply had a knife, awl, and a lot of skill. And that I should try to reconstruct it with the least number of tools possible. However, as an experimental archaeologist I was interested in matching the cut marks, carving and general craftsmanship to the tools. Each of the tools pictured contributed in some way to the final outcome.

### **Brief Discussion of Interpretation**

During the course of the reconstruction a few ideas as to the use of the object have been discussed between myself, Katherine and visitors. These candidate ideas include suspension on leather around the neck or from a belt as a needle case, salt container, an amulet or a container for herbs. For further discussion see Fuglesang (1989, p.16).

Whilst photographing the finished object in the Viking exhibition a visitor was watching me, saw the pendant, and appeared to instinctively say 'Oh, a salt container!' I asked him to elaborate. He said he was Finnish and that there is a superstition regarding salt in Finland that goes like this. During a meal if A has salt and B asks for some. A will not give the salt to B directly as it is believed this will cause the death of a sailor. Instead, A would put the salt close to B but not give it directly, and containers such as this reconstructed one, would be used to hold salt for that purpose. Dublinia's folklore teacher will be consulted to see if there is further information on this superstition

Regardless of the validity of this visitor's perspective, in my view the reconstruction is starting to achieve its purpose by generating a visitor experience and engagement between Dublinia's visitors and its Dublin Norse/Hiberno-Norse material culture.



As seen on Norse Fishamble Street? The reconstructed pendant suspended from a reconstructed 9<sup>th</sup> Century 'double dragons' tablet weave belt, also based on a find from Norse Fishamble Street. Courtesy of Katherine McCormack

### Literature

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Riley, D. 2017, *European Woodworking Tools 7<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century: Saws, Scorps, Augers and Chisels*, Daegrad, England.

Wallace, P.F. 2016, *Viking Dublin: the Wood Quay Excavations*, Irish Academic Press, Kildare, Ireland.