

14th-15th century caulking cords from Monkgate, Hull

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7.1.86

Catalogue (Fibre identifications by H.M.Appleyard).

741 (early 14th century). 24 cylindrical twists of fibre; most are 14.0cm long but some are shorter; 1.0-2.0cm thick; all twisted in the S-direction (that is, if the cord is held vertically, the fibres lie in the NW-SE direction). H.M.A: "medium to coarse wool, stained dark brown".

807 (14th century). A twist of fibres 14.0cm long, 1.5cm thick, S-twist. HMA: "These are mostly coarse with a few fine fibres and some of the medium fibres have a continuous medulla; they are pigmented. They are fairly regular in thickness and are straight. The whole mounts and the cross-sections show the features of goat hair."

1024 (14th-15th century). A twist of fibres 11.0cm long, S-twist, found in association with an iron clench bolt. HMA: "There are some fine fibres and some of medium thickness, some of which are non-medullated, others have a continuous medulla....too straight and smooth to be wool".

742 (15th century). 5 twists of fibre, longest 15.0cm, 1.5cm thick, S-twist. HMA: "These fibres are from a double-coat fleece; there is very little scale-pattern left; many of the fibres are medullated, i.e. the coarse fibres; some fibres are pigmented but mostly they are stained brown. From the general appearance and profile these are wool fibres".

816 (15th century). A twist of fibre, 11.0cm long, 0.8cm thick; twisted in the Z-direction (i.e. the opposite direction from the other cords). HMA: "Vegetable fibre; the cross-sectional shape is that of sisal".

827 (15th century). Five twists of fibre, longest 11.0cm, 1.0cm thick, S-twist; remains of square iron rivets/nails present. HMA: "These fibres are badly degraded; they are mostly coarse, medullated and pigmented. There are only a few fine fibres.... probably goat hair".

828 (15th century). Seven twists of fibre, in length 28.0cm, 21.0cm, 21.0cm, 9.0cm, with three pieces less than 5.0cm; 1.0-1.5cm thick, S-twist. HMA: "These fibres are straight and regular in thickness; the coarse fibres are pigmented and some have a wide lattice-type medulla; there are a few fine fibres. A cross-section was prepared and this in particular, plus the detail that could be found in the whole mount indicates calf hair".

Discussion

This collection of sausage-shaped rolls of fibre closely resemble twists of fibres found plugging timbers in ~~other~~ medieval sites. An S-twist roll of wool was used between two overlapping timbers of the medieval dock at Southgate, Hartlepool (1) and three similar examples, one of cow hair and two of wool, were used in a timber revetment at Coppergate, York (2). These 'caulking cords' as they are known seem to have been specially prepared beforehand and dipped in pitch in order to make the plug waterproof (3).

A much larger number of these caulking cords have been recovered from the Bryggen excavation in Norway, a few of them still ^{situ} ~~in~~ between boat-planks and several of them still tarred (4). Out of 151 examples, 129 are dated to the 12th-15th centuries, but wool predominated in the pre-1248 levels, while hair was most commonly used in the 14th-15th centuries. Although the English finds are few, it is possible that they follow the same pattern, as the Hartlepool wool find is 12th century or earlier, while five of ^{the} seven 14th-15th century Hull cords are non-wool (the York finds are not as yet firmly dated). However, plied cords were more common than

than single strands at Bryggen, although singles increased in number until they represented almost 40% of the finds in the 1413-1476 group (plied cords have not as yet been recorded in England). The use of a vegetable fibre at Hull seems to be unusual. No doubt future finds will clarify the English pattern of development.

Notes and References

1. B. Vyner in prep.

2. P. Walton 'The Textiles from 16-22 Coppergate', The Archaeology of York 17/5, forthcoming.

3. The term 'pitch mabs' is used in R. Whitbourne A Discourse and Discovery of Newfoundland, London 1622, p81 (extracted in S.M. Jack Trade and Industry in Tudor and Stuart England, London 1977).

4. E. Schjørlberg 'The Hair Products' The Bryggen Papers, Supp. Papers No.1, 1984, pp73-91.