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Summary

Report on the technology and proposed conservation treatment of an early Medieval eel-trap.

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Anslow's Cottages Basketry 1073 **AML No:886119**

Several fragments of basketry were recovered which probably constituted part of an eel or fish trap. It appears to have been made using a twined basketry technique and this has been recorded using the analysis form from Adovasio (1977, 21-22, see attached). Essentially a close plain weave has been employed, using split hazel (Corylus sp.) stems for both the warp and weft components. The basket seems to have been started around the tapered post of alder (Alnus sp.) with the warps arranged tightly together. From this starting point the trap has then been enlarged by splaying the warps while continuing the plain weave arrangement with the wefts. Both systems are unequal in size, the warps range from 6.4mm to 11mm in width, an average of 7.3mm, and the wefts range from 4.2mm to 9.1mm, to give an average of 6.7mm. The basketry is so closely woven that there is no measurable gap between the weft elements. When required, additional wefts appear to have been "laid in" under exhausted ones, but it is not obvious what method was used for warp splices. Bark has been retained on both systems, on the warps this is arranged towards the inside of the basket, while the wefts are woven with the bark on the outside - possibly this arrangement increased the durability of the trap.

This fragment of basketry seems to be the last chair of a putt type fish trap (Jenkins, 60) or an eel pot like the closely woven Fenland grig type (Jenkins, 278). The latter seems more likely because of the presence of the wooden plug. This trap was found in a stream channel, but it is not known if it was deliberately placed there or accidentally caught there? Often eel traps were placed in stream channels and mill races, in fact one is illustrated in use in a mill race in the Luttrell Psalter (Jenkins, 282).

Archaeological examples from Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands appear to have a more open structure than this trap (Brinkhuizen, 1986), but otherwise the shape appears very similar. In terms of basketry technology there are few differences between prehistoric and recent examples, only local variation. This means that it is impossible to suggest a date for this item based on typology. Therefore the basketry was dated by the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator (sample No: 2126) as BP 1060 $\pm$ 80 (AD 880-1035 1 sigma, or 785-1160 2 sigma).

It is envisaged that the basket will be conserved using vacuum freeze-drying after pretreatment with polyethylene glycol (PEG). A mixed solution of 10% PEG 400 and 15% PEG 4000 (Watson, 1987) will be used to protect the cellular structure during the freezing phase, and consolidate and stabilise the wood against fluctuating humidities when dry. Previously a basket was freeze-dried from just 10% PEG 400, then consolidated with an acrylic resin (Paraloid B72). This caused darkening of the fabric and was difficult to control, but the same level of consolidation can now be achieved with PEG 4000 in the pretreatment solution. The basketry was lifted and will be supported throughout its treatment on plaster of paris reinforced with bandage.

The condition and wood species of the basketry necessitate that it will have to be over dried and allowed to reach its moisture equilibrium on return to ambient conditions. Any repairs will be done using a polyvinyl butral adhesive (PVB, Butvar B79)in acetone and amyl acetate.

It should be possible after this treatment to store the basketry at ambient temperatures and humidities especially if buffered packaging is used. If it is to be displayed, any support material should be either non-metallic or stainless steel as PEG is corrosive to most metals. For the same reasons it should be displayed and stored separately to archaeological metalwork.

References

Adovasio, J.M.; 1977
Basketry Technology: A Guide to Identification and Analysis, Aldine Manuals on Archaeology, Chicago, 15-52.

Brinkhuizen, D.C.; 1986
"Some notes on recent and pre- and protohistoric fishing gear from Northwestern Europe", Palaeohistoria, 25, 7- 53.

Edwards, G.; 1980
"A note on the conservation of a Roman basket from Carlisle.", Antiquaries Journal, Vol. 60, 349-350.

Jenkins, J.G.; 1974
Nets and Coracles, David and Charles, Devon, 44-66, 263-287.

Watson, J.; 1987
"Suitability of waterlogged wood from British excavations for conservation by freeze-drying.", in J.Black (ed), Recent Advances in Conservation, Summer School Press, London, 273-276.

Fig. 13. Analysis form for twined basketry.

Textile Identification Sheet: Twining, Main Body

(Attach appropriate center, rim, and mend-decoration forms as needed.)

1. SITE NUMBER 1982
2. SITE NAME Anslows Cottages, Berkshire
3. CULTURAL AFFILIATION Celtic - Celtic
4. SPECIMEN UNIQUE NUMBER 886119
5. COMPLETENESS OF SPECIMEN AND DEGREE OF FLEXIBILITY
   a. ( ) Complete (✓) Incomplete
   b. (✓) Rigid ( ) Semi-flexible ( ) Flexible
   c. ( ) Decorated ( ) Mended

W100 1073

Enter Specimen Ref.

Profile if Complete Specimen

6. FORM
   a. ( ) Mat ( ) Basket ( ) Bag ( ) Unknown ( ) Other (specify) fish/eel trap
   b. ( ) With end selvage ( ) With side selvage ( ) With composite selvage (✓) Without selvage ( ) With center (✓) Without center
   c. Measurements of complete specimens:
      1. Overall height _____ length _____
      2. Maximum width _____
      3. Width of mouth _____
      4. Other (specify) _____
7. TWINING TYPE
   ( ) Open (✓) Close ( ) Open and close
   (✓) Simple ( ) Diagonal ( ) Simple and diagonal
   ( ) Wrapped ( ) Cross warp ( ) Other (specify) _____
8. STITCH SLANT none — plain weave
   ( ) Z ( ) S
   ( ) Z and S – number of rows of each and pattern _____
   ( ) Stitch slant determined by weft row identations on warp
9. WARPS
   Number of warp elements functioning as a unit _____

	a. Width of individual elements	b. Width of warp unit
Equal		
Unequal, range	6.4mm to 11mm	to
Mean	7.3mm	
No. of meas.	7:	

Warp Texture
   c. (✓) Rigid ( ) Semi-flexible ( ) Flexible
   d. ( ) Whole ( ) Halved: flat side _____ ( ) Quartered

Preparation
   (✓) Cortex intact ( ) Decorticated
   (✓) Unspun ( ) Spun (S or Z) _____ ( ) Cordage _____ (spin and twist)

   e. Additional comments on warps made from split twigs/osiers, and the bark in this system is arranged towards the inside of the trap.

10. WEFTS

a. Weft Row Separation (Gap)

(✓) Close twined
( ) Open twined

Equal	no measureable gap
Unequal, range	to
Mean width	
No. of meas.	

b. Width of Weft

	Individual Weft	*Weft Unit*
Unequal, range	4.2 to 9.1mm	to
Mean width	6.7mm	
No. of meas.	12	

c. Number of weft elements functioning in each weft row _____

d. Number of weft rows per centimeter (to nearest ½) 1½-2

Weft Texture

e. ( ) Flexible–semi-flexible
( ) Wrapped twining

Preparation

f. (✓) Unspun ( ) S–spun
(✓) Cortex intact ( ) Z–spun
( ) Decorticated ( ) Cordage _____ (spin and twist)
( ) Retted
( ) Other (specify) split twigs/osiers with bark on outside

11. WARP SPLICES

a. ( ) New warps inserted into pre-existing weft crossings
( ) U-shaped warps encircle a weft row
( ) New warps formed by "cloning"
( ) Other (specify) not obvious what method was used

b. Width of Warp:

	Individual Element	Warp Unit
Equal		
Unequal, range	to	to
Mean		
No. of meas.		

c. Differences in spliced element material, preparation, etc. _____

12. WEFT SPLICES

a. (✓) "Laid-in" under exhausted wefts
( ) Bound to exhausted wefts with _____ knots (number and type)
( ) Looped around warp elements
( ) Other (specify) _____

b. Differences in width of weft element and unit, material, preparation, etc.

13. WEAR PATTERNS, STAINS, ETC.

	Obverse	*Reverse*
Carbonized	( )	( )
Wear from utilization	( )	( )
Sheen _____	( )	( )
Stain _____	( )	( )
Organic residue _____	( )	( )
Inorganic residue _____	( )	( )
Pitched _____	( )	( )
Other _____	( )	( )

14. COMPOSITION

	Warp Genus/Species	*Weft* Genus/Species
(✓) Woody stem	Corylus sp. (Hazel)	Corylus sp.
( ) Retted plant stems		
( ) Bunched plant leaves		
( ) Hollow reeds		
( ) Animal skin strips		
( ) Animal sinew strips		
( ) Other Post / Plug	Alnus sp. (Alder)	

15. MISCELLANEOUS ATTRIBUTES

Describe (where possible) methods of closure, permeability, attributes (straps, handles, etc.) and measurements found on the specimen which are not covered in this form.