

# Cordage

**Period:** all periods

**Material:** textile

**Complete items**

These short lengths of cord have been spun from nettle and flax fiber. The fibers can be found within the stems of flax and common stinging nettles. They are separated from the stem by a process of soaking the plant and breaking away the woody stem core when dry. The fibers are then combed to smooth them out. They can then be spun on a spindle or twisted by hand. Other plants were also used to create cords, including rushes, hemp and, at the Neolithic site of Skara Brae in Orkney, crowberry.



*Replica metal combs (heckles) for combing wool*

© Arran Textiles

These cords have been made with two threads twisted together, to make the cord stronger and to stop it unwinding. The more cords that are twisted together, the thicker and stronger the rope will be. Nettle thread is well suited to making thin rope cords like this because it is straightforward to work and small amounts can be found easily. For making cloth, however, flax was preferred.



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*These pottery sherds from East Lothian were decorated using cords*

Cords and rope very rarely survive because they rot easily, but they would have been used for a variety of tasks from early prehistory, particularly binding structures or controlling sails on boats. Cords were also used to imprint decoration on prehistoric pottery. Lips around the rim of pots can also indicate that cloth lids were tied over them, much like modern jam jars.

***How many uses can you think of for a piece of string?***

**See also:**  
CT Textiles

The Experimental Archaeology: Learning about Craft and Technology in the Past project was funded by Historic Environment Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund (now National Lottery Heritage Fund).

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