

Woven Belts and Bands

Period: Bronze Age, Iron Age or Early Historic
(c. 2500 BC – 1000 AD)

Material: textile

Complete items

These three textile belts have been woven from wool using a technique known as 'tablet weaving'. Although the textiles themselves almost never survive, bone tablets used to make these



belts have been found in a few late prehistoric sites across Scotland. The tablets can be square, triangular or circular.

The narrow black and grey belt was made using circular tablets with only two holes for threads – the resulting belt is thin and flexible. Simple geometric patterns can be achieved with these tablets.

The grey and green belt was made using triangular tablets with three holes, resulting in a slightly tougher but still flexible band. Changes in the way the tablets are turned are obvious and so patterns are more difficult to achieve with triangular tablets.

The orange, green and beige band was woven using square tablets with four holes, creating a thick, sturdy material. Four-holed tablets provide the most opportunity to create complex patterns and textures by turning different tablets in different directions.

It is known from the remarkably intact late Iron Age Orkney Hood that woven bands like these were used to edge clothing. This provides decoration but also reinforces the edges of garments. It is possible that depictions of clothing on Pictish symbol stones such as on the stone from Golspie, also show tablet woven edging.



Bone tablets for tablet weaving, now in the NMS, Edinburgh. HR 819 was found in Tain, GJ 12 was found at Keiss Broch, Caithness



Tablet weaving in progress, here using cardboard tablets



This side of the Golspie Pictish stone contains abstract symbols, a Pictish beast and a story. Note the hem of the tunic which could have been produced using tablet weaving. The stone is in Dunrobin Castle Museum

How are our clothes decorated today?

See also:
CT Textiles

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