

Aglets

How to make them using only the tools seen in the images

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For Canterbury Faire 2017, I tried to make aglets (metal tips for cords) for laces made by Mistress Leta, for a quest arranged by Mistress Katherine Kerr in honour of Hugh's laurelling. Aglets have turned into an interesting challenge, so I've been studying extant aglets and period images of aglet-makers at work.

Typical features of extant aglets:

- Come in a several major types
 - butted or overlapped seam, with or without rivet (common from 13th-17th centuries)
 - rolled-in edges (less common, found later – from 16th C) – perhaps suited to tape or ribbon rather than cord
 - highly decorated “aglets” – jewels rather than functional lace-tips (I'm not considering these)
- Made of copper or brass sheet (c.0.18-0.6mm, depending on cord size)
- 20-35mm long (occasionally longer)
- Diameter smaller or equal to that of the cord or lace
- Taper only slightly – they're conical rather than cylindrical, but only just
- Aglets were used on leather thongs and on a wide range of textile cords, laces and ribbons



<http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/140171.html>

What we learn from images of aglet-makers:

Aglet-making appears to have been practiced as a distinct profession: this is a trade a person could earn a living in.

Images of aglet makers typically show a man at a table with a hammer, a small, grooved anvil (much like a modern jeweler's swaging block), piles of cords cut to length, with and without aglets attached. He is often using the hammer on a cord, apparently working an aglet directly onto the cord.

In one image of a workshop with several men working one is forming an aglet, one is cutting aglet-blanks with large scissors, and one is working a large hide with a moon-knife.

Hides appear in several images – it seems that aglet-makers cut whole hides into thongs.

Presumably textile cords were bought from silk- and linen-workers.

The workshops depicted are quite bare: other tools are not apparent.

A little more can be gleaned from various text-references: that the typical tools of an aglet-maker were “a bodkyn a Hammer a litell sythye and other tools to tagge points”; that ‘points’ (i.e. cords with aglets) were often sold by the dozen, at a number of fixed lengths; that even leather points were sold in various colours.

I have found it possible to make aglets using only a hammer and grooved anvil, plus scissors and bodkin, forming the aglets directly around the laces (as in these images of aglet-makers). Working this way I can produce functional aglets at a speed that seems consistent with this being a viable trade. The resulting aglets are firmly attached to the cords, pass easily through eyelet holes, and look like the extant examples.

Images and other references

- Dress Accessories, c. 1150- c. 1450 (Medieval Finds from Excavations in London) by Geoff Egan, Frances Pritchard
- Techniques for the Manufacturing of Aiglets during the Late Middle Ages, with a Comparison of Medieval, Post Medieval and Modern Methods by Gerald Livings

<http://www.livingstonjewelers.com/library/AigletsSCA20150425.pdf>

- St Peter's St Street Northampton by John H Williams (1979); section on Copper Alloy Objects by G E Oakley

(right) <http://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/dlf/12703/171/0/>

(below) <http://www.nuernberger-hausbuecher.de/75-Amb-2-317b-39-v> [1582]



43
 Dieser Mann am Meßter ist am 27. marzo a 76. In das hiesige
 brüderhaus eingenommen worden. Er ist alters bey 64. Jahren
 Und ist also gestorben den 3. aprilis Jhr 1582. Jar. In der
 zeit da er hier brüderhaus gewest ist. 6. jar. und 6. tag. er hat sich
 Götze sehr frölich und innig gegen den andern brüdern
 421
 und ist am gott fröhlicher man gewest. — — —



<https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/766255> (below)