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Acorn Knop

RAT-TAIL	None
LENGTH	14.4cm / 5.63in
WEIGHT	17gm / 0.54oz
MAKER	Unascribed
MAKER'S MARK	None
DATE	c.1200–25
PERIOD	Henry III
TOWN	York (possibly)
COLLECTION	Private

DESCRIPTION

This well-modelled acorn knop was found buried under the floorboards of a Yorkshire farmhouse, hence the corrosion and some flaking to the surface. Its fine tapering hexagonal stem is sharply faceted throughout its length, the front and back facets being very narrow. The stem joins the bowl without a rat-tail to support the bowl, which has a medium drop. The well-modelled finial is in the form of an acorn in its cup, and shows the original gilding and engraved hatching. There is an authentic-looking pip on the top.

COMMENT

It is often very difficult to date unmarked medieval spoons accurately. This spoon must be one of the earliest owing to the fineness of the stem. Note that the front and back facets are particularly narrow, unlike those of spoons of later date which become very wide. The bowl has a medium drop, and at this very early date spoons do not have even a rudimentary rat-tail. Therefore the suggestion that this spoon dates between c.1200 and 1225 is safe.

All of the acorn knop stems are hexagonal and taper from the bowl to the finial, the stem is formed from the bowl and a rudimentary rat-tail starts to appear from the fourth quarter of the thirteenth century. The bowls are generally round with a short triangular area to meet the stem. Overall the bowls are relatively shallow and would not hold a great deal of liquid.

Mrs How dated this particular spoon as late thirteenth to early fourteenth century on her invoice; however, while discussing its date she said she considered it highly likely it was earlier because of the form discussed above.

The value attached to early spoons becomes apparent when reading old wills. There are regular references to single silver spoons or to groups, sometimes large.

In 1351 John de Halegh bequeathed to Thomas Taillour 'twelve silver spoons with akernes' and in 1361 John Botillor, draper, left to his wife Isabella his 'twelve best spoons with gilt acorns'.

See Sotheby & Co., *The Choice Series of Rare Medieval and London Spoons, formerly in the Celebrated Collection of the Late Hubert Dynes Ellis, Esq., 30 May 1935, and now the Property of Lt-Col. J. Bennett-Stanford*, for more acorn knops and other early spoons.

NOTE

How, *Silver Spoons* (vol. I, p. 158), illustrates an acorn knop spoon fully marked and dated 1585. As may be seen from the style of the spoon, it is totally out of character and not a true acorn knop. Spoons such as this have been ignored in the date ranges as they were made out of period and would mislead cataloguers and collectors of spoons.

PROVENANCE

Private collection
How of Edinburgh
Spencer's of Retford, Nottinghamshire,
sale on 5 April 1993, lot no. 224, for
£1,540, bought by Mrs How
Private collection
Sold at Phillips, Leeds, 3 September 1977,
when part of the collection of Dr C.G.
Kay Sharp was sold

EXHIBITED

Three Centuries of York Silver 1550–1858,
at Merchant Adventurers Hall, Fossgate,
York, 14–18 July 2000 (item 1 in the
exhibition catalogue)
Exhibited at Temple Newsam House
Museum

