

CERAMICS

(including bulk finds)

STORAGE

- ◆ For bagged and boxed bulk finds: Keep bulk ceramic finds on low shelves. Only fill boxes with pottery sherds to a safe carrying weight. You might consider specifying a maximum box weight in your Deposition Policy and Procedure.
- ◆ Ceramics are especially at risk from vibration. Open storage can cause movement and damage if a store is subject to vibration (e.g. sprung floors, high footfall, busy road nearby).
- ◆ While ceramics are generally stable, some (especially Prehistoric) are physically fragile. Pad them to prevent overcrowding.
- ◆ Conserved or consolidated vessels are composite objects susceptible to light and temperature changes. Make sure environmental guidelines are provided by the conservator after treatment.
- ◆ Block-lifted ceramics should have soil removed before long-term storage.
- ◆ Fluctuating temperatures are a particular risk for ceramics with soluble salts (e.g. recovered from marine or industrial environments).



Glazed ceramic tile © Bristol Culture



Chamber pot © Bristol Culture

LABELLING AND MARKING

Most ceramics can be given surface marking.

- ◆ Undertake a documentation check to ensure that the information is correct before remains are marked.
- ◆ Ensure that marking is clear and legible.
- ◆ Use a layer of Paraloid B72, then ink, then a layer of Paraloid B72 to seal.

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

- ◆ Temperature: 0–35°C.
- ◆ Humidity: 25–55%.
- ◆ Illuminance: 300 lux maximum.
- ◆ UV Radiation: 0–10 microwatts per lumen ideal. 75 microwatts per lumen maximum.

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INDICATORS OF DECAY

- ◆ Efflorescence (salts leaching from the surface).
- ◆ Loosening and detachment of the surface (spalling) caused by salts.
- ◆ Shape may start to slump on reconstructed vessels.

WHERE YOU WILL COME ACROSS CERAMICS

- ◆ In statues, carvings and architectural features.
- ◆ Archaeological objects of all periods.
- ◆ Bulk finds in archaeological excavation archives (e.g. ceramic building material, pottery sherds).

HANDLING

Ceramics are especially at risk from poor handling and mechanical shock, such as dropping.

- ◆ Be aware of weight and shape and support the ceramic object evenly when lifting. Avoid lifting by handles or parts that stick out (e.g. finials, spouts, knobs, limbs of figures). Support fragile areas with padding.
- ◆ Most ceramics can be handled without gloves if hands are clean and dry. Use nitrile gloves where finger marks might damage surface finishes (e.g. unfired, gilded or lustre decoration) or when handling unglazed pieces. Remove jewellery that might scratch or catch before handling.
- ◆ Handle fragile objects over a padded surface.



Grey ware sherds © Bristol Culture

LOOK OUT FOR

Organic residues adhering to ceramics. They can look like dirt or soils but are evidence of use. Bag ceramics with possible residues separately to prevent contamination.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- ◆ Bulk finds can be heavy. Store them on low level shelves in store. Wear steel-toe-capped boots when moving them.
- ◆ Ceramics can have sharp break edges. Handle with care!

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SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Archaeological Ceramic Building Materials Group (ACBMG) (2002) *Ceramic Building Material Minimum Standards for Recovery, Curation, Analysis and Publication*

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