

# LEATHER

## STORAGE

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- ◆ Bulk leather finds are stored in bags and boxes and usually do not need padding.
- ◆ Support flat leather objects on a padded surface and bag them.
- ◆ Support whole objects in their natural position, e.g. store shoes upright on their soles.
- ◆ Do not use silica gel.

## LABELLING AND MARKING

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Label bags or boxes, not the leather itself (it is too porous and absorbent for direct marking).

- ◆ Undertake a documentation check to ensure that the information is correct before remains are marked.
- ◆ Ensure that marking is clear and legible.

## ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

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- ◆ Temperature: 10–20°C.
- ◆ Humidity: 45–65% (over 65% RH is a high risk for mould).
- ◆ Illuminance: 150 lux maximum.
- ◆ UV Radiation: 0–10 microwatts per lumen ideal. 75 microwatts per lumen maximum.

## INDICATORS OF DECAY

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- ◆ Mould.
- ◆ Dry, embrittled edges.
- ◆ Lamination or detached pieces.
- ◆ Efflorescence (salts leaching from the surface).



Embossed leather fragment © Bristol Culture

## WHERE YOU WILL COME ACROSS LEATHER

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- ◆ In archaeological excavation archives.
- ◆ In costume collections.
- ◆ In archaeological objects of all periods.
- ◆ In World Culture collections.

## HANDLING

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- ◆ Use nitrile gloves.
- ◆ Use two hands when handling, and handle over a padded surface covered in acid free tissue.
- ◆ Be aware of laminating surfaces and objects with detached or disintegrating parts (e.g. shoes where stitching has decayed).

# LEATHER

## LOOK OUT FOR

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- ◆ Leather which was recovered waterlogged. Treat these as waterlogged objects if they are in a wet state.
- ◆ Leather as a common component of composite objects. Leather objects may have metal rivets or surface gilding that may corrode.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

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- ◆ Leather can be contaminated with mould or with chemicals from the excavation site (e.g. toxic metal salts, cess-pit material).
- ◆ Wear an appropriate facemask if mould or biocides are a risk.
- ◆ Use nitrile gloves, and avoid opening bags and boxes where necessary.
- ◆ Waterlogged materials may have been previously treated with toxic biocides.



Medieval leather shoe © Bristol Culture

## SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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Collections Trust (2009) *Labelling and Marking Museum Objects*.

Cronyn, J. M. (1990) *The Elements of Archaeological Conservation*. London: Routledge

Ganiaris, H., Keene, S., and Starling, K. (1982) 'A Comparison of some Treatments for Excavated Leather', *The Conservator* 6:12–23

Historic England (2018) *Waterlogged Organic Artefacts: Guidelines on Recovery, Analysis and Conservation*.

Watkinson, D. and Neal, V. (1998) *First Aid for Finds* (Third Edition; London; Rescue/UKIC Archaeology Section, revised 2001)