



Archaeological Leather Group NEWSLETTER

Issue 7
February 1998

Welcome to the seventh issue of the ALG Newsletter. Enclosed is the provisional programme and booking form for the spring meeting, which will, as you can see, be in London, and so should be easy for members to get to. As this also includes the AGM of the Group, the reports from the Chair and the Secretary are included. The Treasurer's report will be available on the day.

Other items in this issue include a report on the meeting held in the autumn on concealed shoes, including summaries of the papers presented by **June Swann**, **Marquita Volken**,

and **Fiona Pitt**. Also there is news of a reconstructed glover's workshop in Stratford upon Avon, human tooth-marks on offcuts, the Group's bibliography and a possible trip to Chateau Renault. Also a reminder for members to pay their subscriptions.

Finally, may I make a plea as editor of this newsletter? In order to be an editor, I need contributions. These can be on any aspect of leather technology, artefactual analysis or reviews of new books. I would like contributions for the Summer edition (issue number 8) by the end of June, for publication in mid August. Thank you

Annual General Meeting 1998 Notification

The AGM will be held at 4.20pm on Monday 23 March 1998 in the Main Lecture Theatre of the British Museum, after the Spring Meeting.

Agenda

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Chair, Secretary and Treasurer's Reports

- 3 Vote to adopt proposed minor changes to constitution, in accordance with the format required for Charitable Status
- 4 Any other business

Chair and Secretary's Report

Membership levels currently stand at 75. One of the main strengths of the Group is, I feel, the diversity of the members who share a common interest in the same material: it includes leatherworkers, archaeologists, conservators, scientists and curators etc.

The **Museum of Leathercraft** in Walsall gave us a pleasant and informative day and a venue for our AGM in April 1997. We had a fascinating lecture on lornery, a tour of the museum and visits to local leather workshops. Thanks were expressed to the retiring chairman, Diana Friendship-Taylor and to Chris Calnan as Treasurer, for all their hard work serving the Group over a number of years.

The Autumn Meeting at the **Museum of London**, *Hidden Shoes and Concealed Beliefs*: a study of footwear and other objects deliberately placed within the fabric of buildings was a great success.

There is no need to elect committee members this year. The tenureships of the chair (**Quita Mould**), Secretary (**Barbara Wills**), Editor (**Tim Padley**) and Treasurer (**Roy**

Thompson) are not due to expire until 2000. The Ordinary member (**Esther Cameron**) is due for re-election in 1999. **Diana Friendship-Taylor** has kindly agreed to be co-opted on to the committee to help arrange future meetings.

Constitutional change: the committee decided to amend the constitution so that the Group could qualify for Charitable Status with minimal extra work, should this be of benefit in the future. Hence the suggested minor changes supplied on the enclose sheet, which are to be voted on at the AGM. Please send comments to the Secretary or Chair if you wish.

Plans for the coming year: the Spring Meeting will be held at the **British Museum**, *Current Practise in the Conservation of Waterlogged and Desiccated Archaeological Leather*. The Autumn Meeting will take place later than planned, possibly early 1999, to take advantage of lecturer's availability. This leaves a window of opportunity for another activity in September 1998. We hope to organise a practical Study Day on the identification and

analysis of mineralised leather. We will also explore the possibility of a weekend trip to France to visit the Museum of Leatherworking at Chateau-Renault. We would very much welcome other ideas for future meetings and events.

We appreciate that escalating travel costs and increased work commitments make it difficult for many of our members to attend as many meetings as they would like. Consequently we hope to develop the Newsletter as our main organ of communication within the Group. We intend in

future to publish brief summaries of lectures from the Meetings to give the membership fuller information about what has been happening and a taste of the proceedings and the opportunity to follow up particular areas of interest with the individual speaker.

Barbara Wills (Secretary)
Quita Mould (Chair)

Hidden Shoes And Concealed Beliefs

Introduction

Esther Cameron writes:

Quita Mould organised a fascinating ALG meeting at the Museum of London last September. The unusual subject of the meeting - footwear and other objects deliberately placed within the fabric of buildings - took us into the eerie world of superstition and witchcraft. Five speakers, with their feet firmly on the ground, presented an array of evidence for 'concealments' dating from the fourteenth century to the present day and showed that the practice is widespread. Those unable to attend the meeting itself can still gather its essence from resumes of four of the papers given on that day.

The authors include **June Swann** (shoe researcher and consultant, Northampton), **Marquita Volken** (conservator, Centre for Calceology and Historic Leather, Lausanne) and **Fiona Pitt** (previously Assistant Keeper at Northampton Boot and Shoe Museum, now Keeper of Human History at Plymouth Museum).

We thank all the speakers and others who, in various ways, helped to make the meeting such a successful and thought-provoking day.

Shoes Concealed in Buildings

June Swann writes:

Northampton Museum has kept a card index of concealed shoe finds since the late 1950's. The index records the address and date of buildings in which shoes have been found, including main alterations (which is when most shoes were concealed), and their position within the building. Associated finds and finders' comments are also recorded, along with shoe descriptions and (most importantly) their dates and condition, together with any published reference. I hope that finders will continue to send information there as the only way to understand this practice is to gather more evidence. Reports of concealments, now in excess of 1160, involve nearly 2000 items of footwear and come from the British Isles, Western Europe (from Finland to Spain), Switzerland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy and Turkey, as well as right across North America and Australia. Shoes are concealed in all types of buildings. They have been found in cottages, farms, manor houses and palaces, chapels, churches, cathedrals, monasteries and synagogues. They are also found in urban buildings such as factories, rail stations, film studios, barracks, schools, colleges and even museums. The most popular place of concealment is in the chimney (the centre of the home), otherwise in the roof, under floors, above ceilings, sometimes guarding danger points such as doors, windows and stairs. Too many are described as 'found in the wall' but I encourage greater detail by asking if it was near any of the popular places mentioned above, and in the

case of bedrooms by enquiring if it was the master bedroom. I also like to know the relationship to North; it has been suggested that north-east is preferred, which is sacred in Freemasonry, though to date only two are so recorded.

The date of concealed shoes ranges from the fourteenth century to the present day. The most recent date is 1991, and the practice continues. Statistical analysis suggests that the number of concealments increased during the first and last decade of each century.

Apart from 20 unworn shoes, all other concealed shoes are in a worn out condition and they have taken on the character of the wearer. Some finds seem to be a contribution from each member of a family, as though the house was consecrated to their use. Other caches must have been added to by succeeding generations, because of the date range of the objects found.

The concealment of shoes may be a male practice. I have discussed the subject with women but few are aware of its existence. It may be a symbolic substitute for ancient practices involving human or animal sacrifices and deposits associated with the foundation of buildings and the well-being of its inmates. The great scholars of the past seem to have ignored the subject, though much is written on other shoe superstitions which are common wherever shoes are traditionally worn. The secrecy and even reverence that I have encountered demands that we treat the practice with

respect. An underlying fear, that the efficacy of shoe-concealment can be diminished by open discussion, is evident. It appears to involve both fertility and good fortune,

and protection against the reverse; indeed it relates to the two great human concepts of good and evil.

Concealed Footwear in Switzerland

Marquita Volken writes:

In Switzerland, there is at present only one find that is considered by archaeologists to have been deliberately concealed. This is a sixteenth century shoe upper, concealed with a goat's foot, the wall of a monastery. Otherwise, examples of footwear found within the fabric of houses or other buildings, are considered as oddly placed rubbish. Shoes found by architectural contractors go directly into the rubbish bin. Fortunately, shoes found by archaeologists are kept in stock reserves. In neither case are they published or mentioned, except by rare accident. The idea of footwear being concealed in a building for good luck and to keep away bad luck does not seem to be part of modern Swiss culture.

The 'culture' of Switzerland is complicated. Although small in size, Switzerland has four official languages, which divide the country into four distinct cultures. The folklore from each linguistic group has its own history and has developed its own values and traditions. This is a brief survey of unpublished finds from the Swiss Cantons.

French Speaking: In the French speaking region there are three known finds. During the renovation of two houses, children's shoes were found in the timbers of the attic. Both of these houses are in the Jura Canton, and both shoes (sent to the Bally Shoe Museum for identification) are thought to date from the middle of the nineteenth century. The third find is not a shoe, but a knife sheath which was found in the old town of Fribourg, between the floor boards of the second story of a house. The knife sheath, found wrapped in a piece of parchment, probably dates from the sixteenth century.

German Speaking: No shoe finds are known from the German speaking midlands and northern area of Switzerland. In three of the eastern German speaking Cantons, concealed shoes have been found. In the Canton of St Gallen three medieval shoe fragments and one sixteenth century shoe fragment were found in the tower ruin of Wartau. In the neighbouring Canton of Thurgau, two finds from the same archaeological site are recorded: a lady's shoe (probably seventeenth century), modified into a mule, was found in the second story floorboards, and in a room built in

1353 several shoes and cobbler scraps were found together concealed in a cavity in the ceiling. The third find is in the Canton Appenzell Auseroden, which borders both St Gallen and Thurgau. In the wall that separates the barn from the house many shoes, children's toys and apothecary bottles were found during a light renovation. The first renovation yielded six banana boxes full of shoes, which were put out as rubbish. Several years later, a second phase of renovation on the same wall uncovered the lowest layer of shoes, which had been left in place during the earlier renovation since it was too difficult to get them out. There were 45 shoes in this layer, dating from around 1790 to 1920. These shoes document changing technology from hand-made to factory-made shoes.

Italian Speaking: The third linguistic division is the Italian speaking Canton of Ticino, where no information on concealed shoes was available.

Canton of Graubunden: This makes up the fourth linguistic group in Switzerland. Many finds of shoes found here under floorboards or in walls are not considered by local archaeologists as having been 'concealed' but rather as rubbish that was disposed of within the fabric of the house. In the Haldenstien Castle, 7 shoes and a leather seat cover were found under the floorboards with apothecary bottles, playing cards and paper. A single shoe was found under the floor boards of a house on Rabeugasse 3-7, in the city of Chur. Two more shoes were found in the Nikolai monastery in the same city. The first of these, a fancy shoe of mid-seventeenth century date, was found under floorboards in the north-west corner of the chapel. The second, now regarded by archaeologists as a genuine concealed shoe, was found in a scaffolding hole in the north wall of the chapel. The scaffolding hole dates from the construction of the building and was closed up once the building was finished. This indicates that the two items found in the cavity, a shoe upper and a goat's foot, could have been placed within the fabric of the building only by the workmen.

Builders, Bakers and Madhouses: Some Recent Information from the *Concealed Shoe Index*

Fiona Pitt writes:

Northampton Museum holds the *Concealed Shoe Index* which contains details of concealed shoes reported to museum staff since the 1950's. The aim of this paper is to examine the information contained in the index in terms of how much it can tell us about the custom of concealing shoes.

To date, the index contains over 1100 instances of concealed shoe finds. The amount and quality of the information about individual finds varies. One claim by a builder, that a twentieth century Native American moccasin made for the tourist market was concealed, is extremely

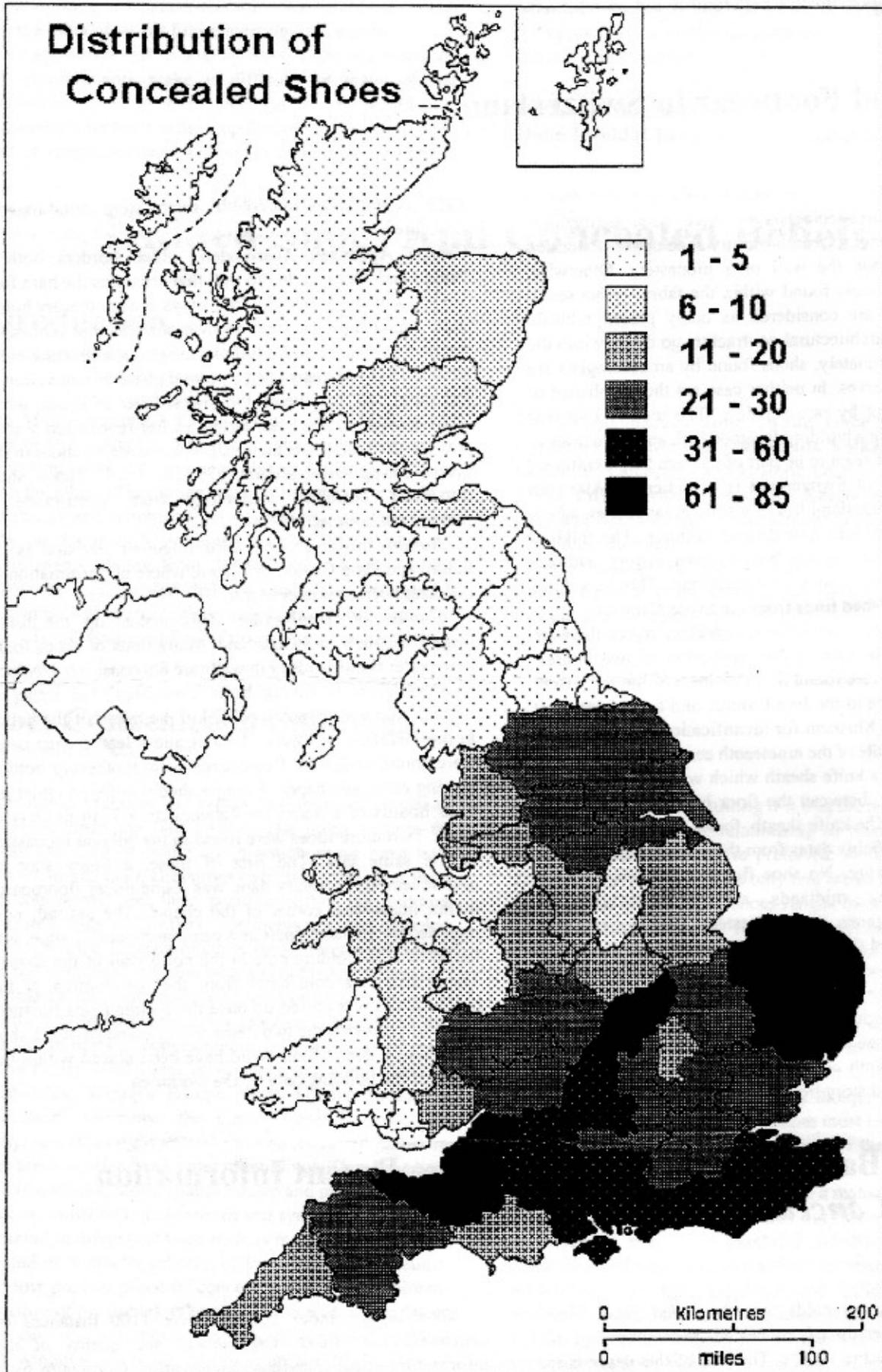


Figure 1

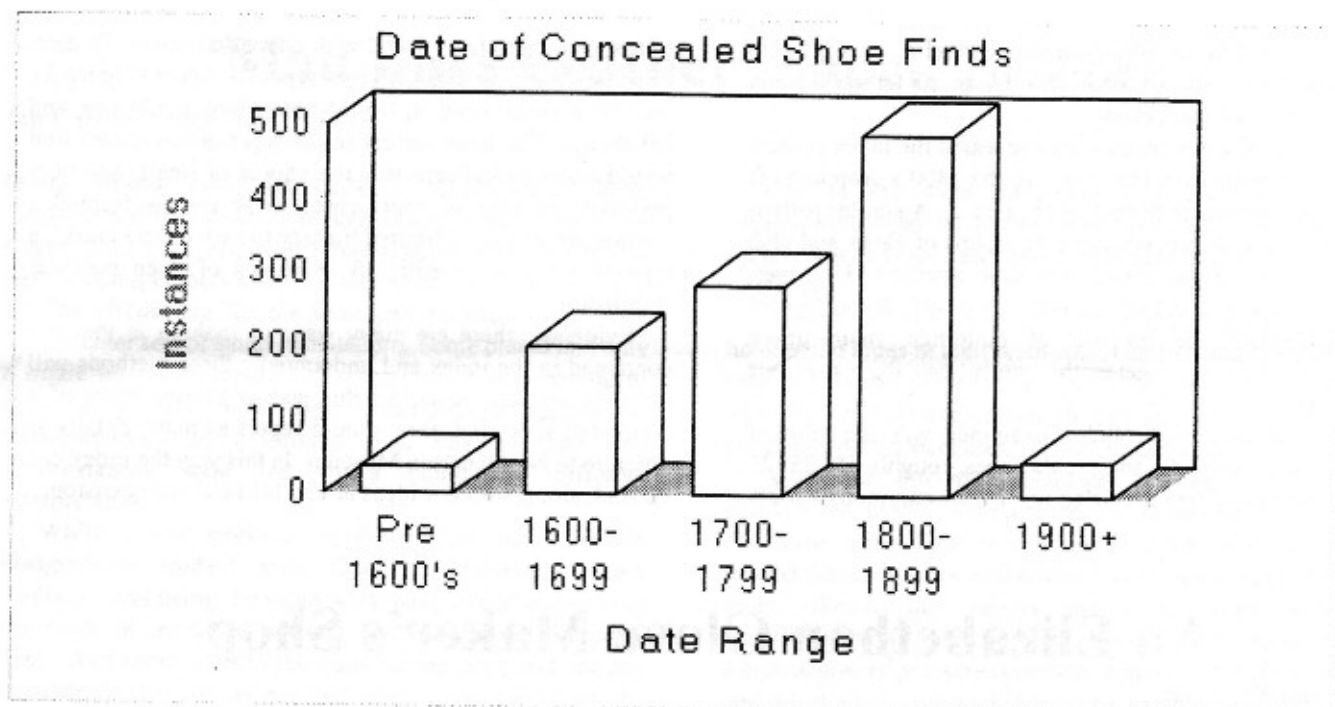


Figure 2

unlikely. However, most of the information is of good quality, giving details about the age and sex of the wearer of the shoes, where exactly in a building they were found and whether or not there were any associated finds.

The distribution map (Figure 1) shows instances of concealed shoe finds in England, Scotland and Wales. The statistics are calculated by counting the number of instances

of shoe finds within each county, an instance being a deposit of concealed shoe finds, whether it is a group or single find. Looking at the map one might draw the conclusion that the highest concentrations represent the areas where the custom was most prevalent. However, the bias towards Northampton, Suffolk and Somerset undoubtedly reflects the information gathering activities of **June Swann, Timothy**

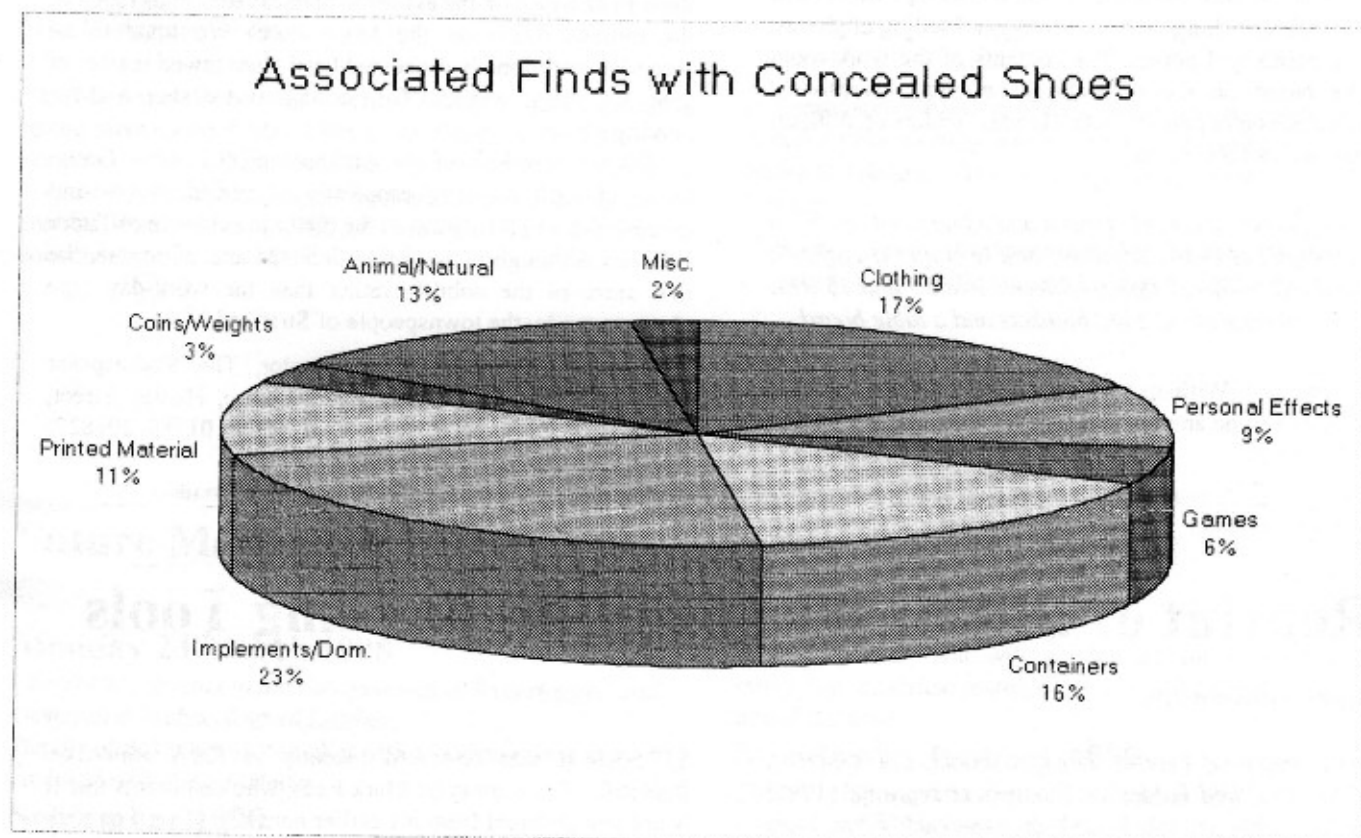


Figure 3

Easton and Clarks Museum respectively. Clearly, this reinforces the view that the information so far collated is merely the tip of the iceberg.

In terms of when shoes were concealed the index reveals a steady increase from the 1600's to the 1800's dropping off sharply in the twentieth century (Figure 2). A similar pattern is revealed for the concealment of groups of shoes and also the inclusion of associated non-shoe artefacts. However, apart from the twentieth century drop off, these figures equally reflect the survival of buildings, many more remaining from the nineteenth century than from previous centuries.

Another area of the index examined was the ratio of children's to women's and men's shoes, roughly 50: 25: 25 % respectively. The index also reveals an enormous variety

of associated artefacts found with concealed shoes. To date, this numbers over 200 different types of object (Figure 3), including finds from a Northamptonshire madhouse and bakehouse. The huge variety in the types of associated find would seem to indicate that the choice of items was very personal. Perhaps in some cases these groups formed a method for people of limited literacy to 'leave their mark', a type of physical graffiti left in places of deep personal significance.

Evidently, there are many ways of looking at the data contained in the index and undoubtedly these methods will develop over the years. To this end, if anyone hears of a concealed shoe find, they should report as many details as possible to Northampton Museum. In this way the index can expand, along with our ideas about this fascinating custom.

An Elizabethan Glove-Maker's Shop

Ann Donnelly writes:

William Shakespeare's father, John, is recorded as being a glove-maker, whittawerer and wool dealer during the latter half of the sixteenth century.

As part of the project to re-display Shakespeare's Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon, the Birthplace Trust hope to recreate an accurate representation of his workshop and woolstore as they may have appeared in the 1570s. Work on the room settings will start late next year, if a Heritage Lottery application is successful.

Considerable work has been done on the research and the planning of the reconstruction of the workshop, which will illustrate the stretching, cutting, sewing and selling of gloves, mittens, points and purses. The contents of the work-room will be based on the evidence of gloving inventories, including one belonging to Joyce Hobday, widow of William Hobday, a Stratford glover:

A drawing knife ... a parcel of black and white wool at 15s., a parcel of coarse wool ... a pillion and a cloth ... a coffer, a form and old leather. 2 dozen of deer's leather and 15 Irish skins, an old pack cloth, 2 old blankets and a table board.

The inventory of William Badger of Stratford gives valuable information on the amount and type of wool being stored in glover's houses:

In the solar over hall

*Six tod of fine wool, ten tod of coarse wool price £6
Item two barrels, a hurdle, weights for to weigh wool, price 3 shillings
Item two skeining wheels price 2d.*

Item four hundred of leather in the ground price £3

Workshop furniture, tools and leather goods will of course be in replica and the Trust is most anxious to ensure that these items are accurate in every detail. Ideally we would like them to be based on the evidence of excavated finds (such as the mittens found on the *Mary Rose*) We hope to be receiving traditionally processed basil alum tawed leather of goat, kid sheep, and calf for 'storing' in the shop and for making gloves.

Do any members of the Archaeological Leather Group know of such remains, especially of period gloves and purses? We will also draw on the pictorial evidence of Tudor portraits, although most gloves depicted are, of course, the fine attire of the nobility rather than the work-day type gloves worn by the townspeople of Stratford.

Ann Donnelly, Museums Curator, The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, The Shakespeare Centre, Henley Street, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, CV7 6QW; 01789 201827; Fax. 01789 297539 (please telephone first); e-mail: museums@shakepearetrust.demon.co.uk

Reprint of Dictionary of Leatherworking Tools

Marquita Volken writes:

The *Dictionary Of Leather Working Tools, C.1700-1950, And Tools Of Allied Trades* has finally been reprinted (1996) and is available in soft bound or paperback form from Astragal Press, Mendham, New Jersey, USA, 337 pages,

\$37.50. It was reviewed recently in *Early American Industries Association* by Mark Rees, who comments that it is not any different from his earlier hard bound version with the exception that the illustrations and plates are not as good.

'Man Bites Leather' Shock In York

Ian Carlisle writes:

Quita Mould and I are currently researching a large Anglo-Scandinavian and medieval leather assemblage from Coppergate, York, and some interesting offcuts have come to light which members might be able to help us with.

The offcuts are for the most part secondary and have semicircular sets of small indentations. Some pieces had only a single set, while others had several, often overlapping or merging. I have seen these described in reports as 'clamp-marks', so I initially took this as read, but circumstances soon led to a completely different interpretation.

While I was working on the leather, an American postgraduate student from Bradford University, **Amy Sullivan**, was using the same workspace whilst researching the teeth of medieval skeletal material from Fishergate, York. As a result, I got to see many human jaws, and one day it suddenly dawned on me that what I was seeing on my offcuts were actually human bite marks. When I asked Amy about this, she measured some of the marks and was able not only to confirm my suspicions, but also to point out differences between marks made by the different tooth types.

Unfortunately, although the marks are now identified as human bite marks, their meaning evades us, though several theories have been put forward.

One of the more outlandish (and most evocative) suggestions so far is that these offcuts were employed by surgeons as pads for patients to bite on during amputations or operations.

Another is that the marks were perhaps caused by tanners holding the hides in their teeth whilst de-fleshing or scraping prior to tanning, or by carriers performing a similar activity with the newly-tanned hides, though as both of these are pretty noisome procedures, this seems unlikely.

A similar, but more plausible, explanation, is that perhaps the marks were caused by shoemakers or other craftsmen using their mouths as a 'third hand' to hold smaller pieces of work whilst their hands were occupied with tools. Whilst this seems the most likely theory, experimentation carried out with new leather has shown that a high degree of pressure is needed to produce similar marks, and it is doubtful whether the leather would need to be held particularly tightly in this case.

If anyone is familiar with these marks, or has further information, please contact either **Quita Mould** or myself. I would like to express my thanks to **Amy Sullivan** for identifying the teeth, **Jim Spriggs** of York Archaeological Trust Conservation Laboratories for the 'third hand' idea, and **Quita Mould** for the 'surgeon's pad'.

Medieval Personal Containers - A Talk

Jane Bridgeman writes:

The **Medieval Dress and Textile Society** is holding their spring meeting on 9 May 1998 at the Courtauld Institute in London. The subject will be *The Medieval Personal Container*, an exploration of the ways personal goods and chattels were carried and of the materials from which the containers were made. On 7 March 1998, there will be a visit

to Canterbury Cathedral to look at bourses and bags. The Autumn 1998 meeting is to be a two-day event held with the National Gallery. The subject is Burgundian Dress and Textiles.

Contact: **Jane Bridgeman**, MEDATS Programme Secretary, 2, Granville Square, London WC1X 9PF.

Leather Group Business

Future Meetings

Monday 23 March 1998

Current Treatments in the Conservation of Waterlogged and Desiccated Archaeological Leather.

Details of this meeting, together with a booking form are enclosed with the newsletter.

September 1998

A study day is being arranged for early September, at the British Museum. This will be on the study of mineralised and

decayed leather, and will concentrate on archaeological rather than historical material. Details will be circulated nearer the time.

Monday 11 January 1999

The 1999 Spring Meeting will be held at The Museum of London, and will be on Leather Clothing. The details of this meeting have yet to be finalised.

Proposed trip to Chateau-Renault, Summer 1998

From time to time, members of the ALG have the opportunity to visit places of leathery interest in this country, but it might be pleasant to roam further afield. Chateau-Renault is a small town, not far from Tours, Amboise and Blois in the Loire area of France. It was once known in France as 'the city of leather' but the tanning industry declined in this century. Cowhides were transformed into transmission belts and shoe soles. The museum at Chateau-Renault is sited within an old tannery, and has six rooms displaying information and equipment relating to the preparation and tanning of hides. The curator has said he would be happy to give us a tour of the museum.

Costs for a long weekend would be (fairly approximately) as follows:-

Return travel	
by Eurostar from Waterloo Station to Tours	£89
Three nights' stay	
in a small hotel (sharing a double room)	£45

ALG Contacts

Chair

Quita Mould, Christmas Cottage, Choseley Docking, KING'S LYNN, Norfolk, PE1 8PQ
Tel: 01485 512443

Treasurer

Roy Thompson, Leather Conservation Centre, Nene College Campus, Boughton Green Road, Moulton Park, NORTHAMPTON, NN2 7AN.
Tel: 01504 719766

Travel from Tours to Chateau-Renault would vary according to transport taken (there is a rail link also) but it is likely to be in the region of £10

Food: costs much as it does in London but is infinitely different!

Museum entrance FF12 (£1.30)

Tours is a lovely city with a fine cathedral and an interesting medieval quarter. There is also, incidentally, a charming botanical garden.

If anybody is interested, please write to or contact **Roy Thomson**, Leather Conservation Centre, Nene College Campus, Boughton Green Road, Moulton Park, NORTHAMPTON, NN2 7AN. Should there be sufficient interest, the committee will endeavour to organise a trip during the summer of 1998 or 1999.

Secretary

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Editor

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The Archaeological Leather Group Bibliography

Esther Cameron writes:

Hidden away on computer disk and on various sheaves of paper we have the makings of a useful bibliography, which we want to make available to the Group. If we could simply print and post it we would do so without delay, but the lists need to be sorted, some editing is necessary and some editing has to be done. As this is going to take quite a lot of time, a little patience on your part is needed.

Meanwhile, help is at hand. *The Institute of Archaeology* at Oxford has kindly come to the rescue with an offer of a little secretarial aid. This, spread over three months should enable us to produce the bibliography sometime in the Spring.

Don't expect a 'publishable' product though. All kinds of errors creep into references and eliminating those we already have (by checking each one in a library) is not something anyone on the Committee has time to do. There are two ways in which you can help us improve our bibliography over time. The first is by passing a critical eye over the bibliography when you eventually receive it, or when you come to use it. Also let us know of errors by correcting your sheet and

sending us a photocopy. The second is by ensuring that new references sent to us are **complete and accurate**.

Complete means:	Surname and two initials of author or editor
	Date of publication
	Place of publication (if a book)
	Title of article, in inverted commas
	Title of book or periodical, underlined
	Periodical number
	Page numbers of article

Accurate means what it says: please check that what you have copied out is correct in every way.

We promise that you will all get your bibliographies in the end, and need you to keep it active by sending details of any new material you come across. Please post them to: **Esther Cameron**, Institute of Archaeology, 36 Beaumont Street, OXFORD, OX1 2PG
(E-mail: esther.cameron@arch.ox.ac.uk)