

An Introduction to Archaeological Leather and its Conservation

Taught by Angela Middleton, Senior Archaeological Conservator, Historic England, and Arianne Panton, Manager of Conservation & Research, Leather Conservation Centre

3rd – 4th November 2025, 9:30am – 5pm

The course will be held at the Historic England Laboratories, Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth.

This course combines presentations and practical sessions to introduce course participants to the lifespan of leather, from production to burial and subsequent conservation. Topics covered are listed below and will be illustrated throughout with case studies and practical examples. There will be time throughout the course to follow the conservation process at various stages (impregnation, pre-freezing and vacuum freeze drying), as well as exploring some analytical and imaging/illustration techniques.

Participants are welcome to bring their own objects / images to discuss any conservation issues with the tutors towards the end of the course. The course will conclude with a visit to the Mary Rose conservation facilities and Museum to see Tudor leather.

Topics include:

- The making of leather - Transforming skins into a useable material
- The preservation of leather - Conditions required, where to expect leather finds, first aid and recovery
- Analysis and identification – Introduction to analytical techniques used to extract information from leather, and a practical session on species identification using grain patterns
- Documentation and conservation options for archaeological leather
- Packaging and recommended storage environments
- Case studies and discussion

Practical sessions include:

- Microscopic & magnified examination for animal species identification (including the high-power Keyence microscope)
- Demonstration of FT-IR Spectroscopy
- Drawing and registration of leather
- Vacuum-freeze drying of leather

Field trip:

- An opportunity to see some leather artefacts from the Mary Rose close-up, inspect past conservation treatments and see leather on display. The entrance fee to the museum is included in the course fee.

This course is suitable for conservators and conservation students who have not worked with archaeological leather much, archaeologists or curators/ collections managers who want to learn more about archaeological leather, as well as experts in related fields.

Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Course Fees: £330

Booking deadline: Sunday 19th October 2025

To book your place, please email your contact details and a brief summary of your interest in this topic to Cyd Clift at info@leatherconservation.org.

Please let us know in advance if you have any specific accessibility requirements.