

Japanese Himeji shiro nameshi

21

Soak in the river- hair shaving- back side scraping -salting -drying- humidification- oiling + treading & stamping- drying in the shade-treading-drying-maturing- desalting- washing- drying-humidification- drying+kneading, stamping, stretching- moisturization-ironing- measuring- final shipping

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
LEATHER GROUP  
NEWSLETTER

47 March 2018

visit the ALG website at  
[www.archleathgrp.org.uk](http://www.archleathgrp.org.uk)



CONTENTS

- 2 Editor's note; Forthcoming Meetings
- 3-5 The 2017 Autumn Meeting
- 5-6 *Museum of Leathercraft: Waterer in the Library, Part 3, Spanish Leather* by Pat Thomson
- 6-9 Got a Question? *Enquiries to the ALG*
- 9-10 *An early medieval oddity* by Carol van Driel-Murray
- 10-11 *Gilt leather art in Córdoba loses Carmen Bernier* by Franklin Pereira
- 12 Treasurer's report and subscription reminder
- 13,14 ALG and data protection; New book; Curious about Awl
- 14 Contact details for the committee

## Editor's note

Hello again and a warm welcome to all members, old and new, to this Spring edition of the Newsletter. The very colourful front page records last September's Autumn meeting at the new Leathersellers' Hall in the City of London. The meeting was well attended and an account by Mike Redwood follows on page 3.

In this issue we also have a third article by Pat Thomson arising from the work she is doing at the Museum of Leathercraft library. Here she focuses on John Waterer's considerable contribution to the study of gilt leather. Franklin Pereira records the death of Carmen Bernier - a practitioner and teacher of gilt leather art, well known in Cordoba for more than 60 years.

And finally, as has been promised for a while, we look at some queries the ALG has received through various channels and at the responses these have generated when circulated to members. I hope you enjoy reading the Newsletter and I look forward to receiving contributions to the next issue, for which the deadline will be Monday, 10 September or thereabouts.

*Sue Winterbottom*

### Forthcoming meetings

#### **2018 Spring meeting and AGM**

**Saturday, 28 April 2018**  
**11.00am to 4.00pm, Northampton**

For our Spring meeting and AGM we will be visiting the **National Leather Collection/ Museum of Leathercraft** at Northampton (on Floor 2 of the Grosvenor Shopping Centre, NNI 2EW). Apart from the opportunity to see the Museum's new displays and facilities there will be a guest speaker, Tom Rusbridge, from the University of Birmingham.

Tom is currently working on a PhD, using the case studies of leather objects (saddles, chairs and drinking vessels) as part of a study of consumerism in the early modern period. He will

illustrate his talk with examples from the Museum's collection.

#### **Programme**

11.00 The museum will be open and tea & coffee will be available.

11.30-12.30 approx. **AGM**

12.30 -1.30 Lunch\*

1.30 Talk by Tom Rusbridge, followed by a chance to look around the objects on display and behind the scenes at the stores.

\* *There are a number of cafés in the Grosvenor Centre and also places to buy a sandwich and drink if you prefer to eat back at the Museum.*

#### **AGM business**

Vivi Lena Anderson comes to the end of her second and last term as Ordinary Member and we thank her for her contribution to the committee over the past years. Don't worry, we will be seeing more of Vivi as we hope to visit the Museum of Copenhagen and the National Museum of Denmark next year.

We will need to elect a new Ordinary Member at the AGM. The position is open to any member who has not served in that capacity for a year, so if you are interested in joining the committee please get in touch with either Yvette Fletcher or Quita Mould.

Angela Middleton comes to the end of her first term as Meetings Co-ordinator but happily is willing to serve a second term. Her work load in 2018-19 will be heavy so the rest of the committee are preparing to help where ever they can.

The minutes of the last year's AGM can be found in the Members' section of the ALG website (the password you will need is scabard).

#### **2018 Autumn meeting**

**Saturday, 6th & Sunday, 7th October**

A visit to **Ramsgate Maritime Museum** and **Chatham Historic Dockyard** is planned for a weekend in October. At Ramsgate we will be able to view view leather from the wreck of the

**Cover photo:** The keynote speaker, Professor Yuko Nishimura, addressing the ALG's Autumn Meeting, 'The Enigma of Japanese Leather' at Leathersellers' Hall in London. Photo by Yvette Fletcher.

*Sterling Castle* (1703). At Chatham, among many other exciting exhibits, we can see leather from HMS *Invincible*, which sank in 1758.

You will be emailed with more details nearer the time and these will also appear in the September Newsletter and on the ALG website.

## The Enigma of Japanese leather: The ALG 2017 Autumn Meeting at Leathersellers' Hall,

by Mike Redwood  
michaelredwood@icloud.com

In the same way that every grandparent will tell you that their grandchild is exceptional, every Japanese will tell you the same about their country. With the grandparent you smile benignly and hurry back to reality, but with Japan it is different, as more often than not Japan *is* truly exceptional.

This is very much the case with Japanese leather as became apparent at our seminar held in Leathersellers' Hall on the 19<sup>th</sup> September last year. The seminar covered both the technological and the historic aspects of leather in this unique country. Both vegetable and chromium tanning were very late arrivals in Japan while both an ancient oil tanning process and a brain tanning one were in commercial use until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Dr. Theresa Kamper, one of a handful of world experts in brain tanning, suggested that one of the main reasons so little is known is about Asian tanning history is that uncovering written material and getting it translated is difficult. Certainly, apart from some articles in JALCA and Das Leder early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is almost nothing available in English that we have uncovered.

Cattle and horses only arrived in Japan around the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries and around the same time both brain tanning and oil tanning were brought to Japan by experts from China *via* Korea. Matsumoto *et al.* (2016) explain that brain tanning began in the northern Tungus - a large area from the river Tungus to the Pacific that extends from the Arctic into Manchuria before spreading towards Korea and along the Arctic circle.



Brain and oil tanning were the two tanning areas discussed during the day. Brain tanning came primarily to be used on deer skins and remains a significant production in the town of Koshu, in Yamanashi Prefecture, just 90 minutes by train from Tokyo. There, leather is still silk screened with lacquer to make "Inden" leather although it is no longer brain tanned. The raw skins are imported from China, as is the lacquer which is silk screened onto the leather in distinct patterns, many of which date back 500 years.

**Professor Yuko Nishimura, of Komazawa University, Tokyo, was the keynote speaker (see cover photo).**

The main tanning centre in Japan has always been around Himeji city, famous for its beautiful and important castle. Nobles staying at the castle on their way to regular reunions in Tokyo were big purchasers of leather items. So the leather goods makers were all based in the zone around the castle, while the tanners formed three communities nearby along the banks of the Ichikawa River. Professor Yuko Nishimura, of Komazawa University, Tokyo, the keynote speaker for the event, took the audience through the development of Japanese leather-making using both oil and brain tanned leather. Shoji Nobi a noted historian and author supported her.

She discussed the importance of good brain tanned leather in gloves for kendo and for archery, and the use of the white tanned Himeji leather in a wide variety of end uses from ar-

mour to document boxes. She explained in detail how these fitted into the developing society with its ceremonial routes and the “walking culture” where horses were allowed for emergency and carrying luggage but not in large numbers.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Emperors demanded that all the feudal lords (daimyōs) present themselves in Tokyo and spend alternate years at home. With their families kept hostage and lavish lifestyles to maintain in two locations this reduced the chances of them being able to afford to build armies to challenge the Emperor. It did lead, however, to better roads being built throughout the country and “the construction of inns and facilities along the routes, generating vibrant economic activities”. This was the beginning of Japanese consumer culture.

The tanning process used in Himeji to produce the oil tanned white leather was briefly explained, with the procedure listed as follows:

*Soak in the river- hair shaving- back side scraping – salting –drying- humidification-oiling + treading & stamping- drying in the shade-treading-drying- maturing- desalting- washing- drying-humidification- drying plus kneading, stamping, stretching- humidification-ironing- measuring- final shipping*

Communal stamping/treading, to put oil into the leather, and raise the temperature, was known in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries for the manufacture of Buff Coats in the UK. These were made of thick bovine or even, as explained by Dr. Peter Laight, buffalo hides which could be up to 8 or 9mm thick, and were often worn as armour (Downen). So perhaps this 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese version is not actually so dissimilar.

Prof. Tony Covington, University of Northampton, then explained the difference between “leathering” and tanning: defining alum “tawing”, oil tanning and brain tanning (prior to smoking, which is tanning) as leathering. He explained in detail the effects of different oils which might be used, including the fact that the outcome of oil tanning depends on the amount of unsaturation (double bonds) and heat activation of the polymerisation reaction. Cod liver oil contains roughly twice as many double bonds as rapeseed oil: therefore it is an oil tanning agent, but rapeseed oil, as used in Himeji, is merely a dressing lubricant.

While the difference is significant, the reduced durability implied with rapeseed oil does not



invalidate the material for certain end uses. He explained how soaking, the use of salt and the physical actions on the hides help to make the material a better fit for purpose. Professor Nishimura had brought samples of items made in both brain tanning and oil tanning. These included a fireman’s coat and a moneybag. The boxes were heavily lacquered, a process done by other craftsmen rather than the tanners themselves.

Other samples, all of armour or related items, were displayed by Ian Bottomley who explained the technology of leather that has been revealed through the examination of Japanese armour. The earliest Japanese armour was lamellar, that is to say made from small scales of iron or raw-hide laced with leather thongs. Where larger pieces of leather were used they were often dyed – using indigo for example – or beautifully stencilled. An alternative to stencilling or dyeing was to smoke the leather. The smoke was generated by burning straw to give yellows, or pine needles to give browns. As Professor Nishimura had noted, even today when the deerskin tanners still use some smoke they are very particular about the type of straw that must be used. It was noted that as a tanning process smoking helps the leather to withstand water and abrasion, so was used for riding gloves, and to protect certain more sensitive areas of the armour.

Ian also showed a number of instances where lacquered leathers were used in armour for protection against the wet. The historic use of shagreen from rayskin on a sword hilt was also described. The skin was glued to the wooden scabbard, heavily lacquered, after which the nodules are lacquered and polished down to a smooth surface.

Talking about brain tanning Dr Theresa Kamper, speaking via a recording from the USA, indicated that in her research she had been able to examine brain items as old as 4500BC (from Siberia) along with other items from Switzerland, Denmark, and Alaska.

In the Americas there is evidence of historical brain tanning from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska with extensive samples and records available throughout the traditional lands of the Native Americans. She explained that getting a feel for the history of this technology in the Americas is difficult and is an area of on-going research. The early movements of people were linked with very cold climatic periods so well tanned clothing would have been vital. There is some evidence of activity around 25000BC although 15-20000BC is currently the more generally accepted date. Samples and records do not survive from these times. From the Americas the main samples existing are from about 1000BC. Appropriate tools, that match closely with those used by Cheyenne women today but made from bone or stone, have been found going back to about 8000BC. Dr Kamper presented an extensive bibliography which is available for any member interested.

Dr Peter Laight delighted the audience by providing useful swatches of a wide variety of the leather types being discussed so that members and guests could compare oil, brain and other types of leather for themselves. The meeting concluded with an extended period to examine the many artefacts brought by the speakers.

#### References:

Japanese Traditional Culture Promotion & Development Organization. (JTCP) (2016), The Detailed Lacquered Deer Leather: Koshu-Inden, [http://www.jtco.or.jp/en/tradition\\_report/?id=19](http://www.jtco.or.jp/en/tradition_report/?id=19) Retrieved September 2016

Matsumoto, N. and Bessho, H. (2016) Coexistence and Cultural Transmission in East Asia, Routledge

Downen, K. (2015) 'The Seventeenth Century Buff-Coat', Journal Of The Arms And Armour Society, XXI, No. 5, March.

## National Leather Collection: Museum of Leathercraft

### Waterer in the Library, Part 3

#### *Spanish Leather*

by Pat Thomson

John Waterer had written shorter pieces about gilt leather previously. As a man expert in design and, more broadly, art and culture, one can see what interest gilt leather held for him. Many of the designs on panels and screens resemble a still life from the Low Countries and colourful leather wall hangings are sumptuous in a way that people do not always expect from leather. An earlier library article described the way the leather is manufactured and what the collection holds on the subject. This piece is about Waterer's contribution to the literature and, when it comes to leather, he is often a particularly early commentator.

In 1971, *Spanish Leather*, his second larger work appeared. The title page tells us it is a history "of its use from 800 to 1800 for Mural Hangings, Screens, Upholstery, Altar Frontals, Ecclesiastical Vestments, Footwear, Gloves, Pouches and Casquets." His geographical range is equally wide. In this book, the wall hangings predominate but there are examples of all the smaller items.

The text is helpful in disentangling some of the confusions surrounding the terms used. As with many leather terms, they tend to be used loosely and are then embedded in popular use. 'Spanish' leather had frequently never seen Spain; 'Cordovan' did not necessarily have to have anything to do with Córdoba. As for 'guadamecí', Waterer suggests this term should be confined to a soft goatskin, its origins being from a Middle Eastern place name. This is still subject to argument but it is typically Waterer's style to offer very early references which are fascinating in their own right. It seems safer, then, to use the term 'gilt leather', though as many of you will know, very little of it was actually gold. Most of it was leather covered with silver leaf which was then painted with a yellow varnish, as Waterer describes.

There is a chapter on *Dressing the Skins* and another on *Gilding and Techniques of Decoration*. He describes vegetable tanning, chamoising (an oil oxidising process) and tawing with alum. Spain's particular role is discussed and the 'Hispano-Moresque' style is emphasised. There is an interesting passage on the type of animal favoured - the *musoli* or mouflon, a hair sheep; "... horned like a Ram and skinned like a stag ...," says the *Glossographia* of 1656. Waterer speculates on the origin of gilding leather, doubting that it could have been invented in Spain. He examines its relationship to bookbinding and also points out that "stamped leather was found in the tomb of Tut-ankh-amun." He thinks the first reference to gilt leather wall hangings were those in the inventory of Charles V of France, dated 1380. By this time sheep and calfskin leathers were being used. To descriptions of the techniques involved, Waterer adds places and dates of early methods and recipes.

A large section of the book consists of full page plates of various forms and designs of gilt leather objects and hangings, with notes on each. In addition, there is the thorough Waterer touch which gives us a list of the centres of production across Europe, a chapter on the problems of dating and attribution, a painstaking list of London leather gilders, the sizes of wall hanging panels across Europe, special technical terms, specific fifteenth century ordinances in Córdoba and a list of places where gilt leather can be seen.

There are more recent studies on this subject, of course, but it always proves worth looking at what Waterer says about any subject for the eclectic depth of research and his enthusiasm for leather. His is the thorough and imaginative research on which others can build their own work.



### Enquiries to the ALG

In the course of a year, staff at the **Leather Conservation Centre** in Northampton receive numerous enquiries relating to archaeological leather finds. Yvette Fletcher (Head of Conservation and, currently, ALG Chair) has been circulating some of them to our members and collating the responses received. These show the value of consulting ALG members who, as well as having long experience and diverse specialist knowledge, are rightly famous for their willingness to use both to help others. Email queries can also be sent directly to the ALG by using the link on the front page of our website:

<http://www.archleathgrp.org.uk/>

In April this year Yvette received this enquiry from Mareille Arkesteijn:

*A while ago I received a shoe from a shipwreck discovered in the North Sea. This shoe dates from the first half of the 17th century and when I examined it I found a tar-like substance between some of the leather layers at the heel. It really looks like the layers were glued together before they were pinned down with wooden nails. I cannot find anything similar in any of the documents I consulted. And also my contacts have no clue.*

*I hope one of the members of the Archaeological Leather Group has seen something similar and might shed some light on this find. Anyway it is something I wanted to share with you. Maybe its good to know about its existence and to keep in mind for future finds.*

*I attach some photos of the tar between the layers.*

The following replies were received and forwarded to Mareille.

from **Emma Hocker**, Conservator, *Statens Maritima Museer/ Swedish National Maritime Museums*:

“Dear Mareille

I work at the Vasa Museum in Stockholm (early 17th c. shipwreck). We are about to do a study of the leather goods found on the Vasa so I cannot give you a complete answer just yet. However, we forwarded your question to Al Saguto, a shoe expert from Colonial Williamsburg who is consulting on our shoe collection and he said the following:

*Pine pitch (Swedish preferred, by the way) and pitch-treated/coated leather found its way into shoes. Tared felt was used to in-fill between soles, but I’ve not recorded that until late 1800s into 1900s. Usual shoemaking adhesive is rye flour paste, then sewing and/or wood pegs in heels. That said, in Berlin they used “pitch barm” (pichbaerme), the “first viscous barm taken off of wheat beer” to make press-molded pre-formed scrap leather heels c.1770. All these pastes, however, are fugitive in waterlogged archaeological leather. Maybe the “tar” was an expedient shipboard repair attempt with something sticky that was at hand? Maybe an attempt to waterproof the shoe, like later seamen painted their knit caps with tar?*

Hope this helps! Please keep in touch as once we start our work we would be very interested in comparative material.”

From **June Swann**, footwear historian and former Keeper of the Boot and Shoe Collection at Northampton Museum:

“Tarred boots and shoes are not unusual for the 17th c - I attach my rather meagre Shoe Dictionary entry\*, which does not include my conclusion that tar would be the obvious stuff to put on leather to make it waterproof when at sea. My Scandinavia book, *History of Footwear in Norway, Sweden and Finland* (2001) mentions tar on pp.199, 221, 227, and also shows other waterproofing methods.” \*see p.8

From **Amanda Thomas**, Conservator, Collections, Curatorial and Conservation Branch, Parks Canada:

“I consulted with my colleagues and the answer was that no, they had not seen anything similar to the shoe and to be honest nor had I. As a rule, objects from a marine environment are



Mareille Arkesteijn’s photos of a tarry substance between shoe sole layers.

treated quite differently than those from a terrestrial environment. The expectation for these objects is that they would not only be contaminated with salts but with other substances (tar, iron, biological) as well. For something like the substance seen in the image we would have had it analysed before determining the proper course of treatment.”

|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <p>TAR</p> <p>1689 <i>London Gaz.</i>: Charles Russel, aged 14 years, woollen stockings pitched and tarred, pump shoes, went away from his Master about 10 weeks since.</p> <p>20th c. Birch tar used in Scandinavia; socks and stockings, as well as footwear tarred in living memory. JS 2001 p.199: New summer boots worn for a week, then treated with mixture of ¼ fish train oil, ¾ tar. Worn for another week and treated again. Store for a year before using regularly, and treat once a week with ½ &amp; ½ tar and grease, inside and out.</p> <p>early 20th c. JS 2001 p.221 Sirelius XXIV, 8: birchbark calf boots with tarred cloth sole stitched on.</p> <p>c1910 JS 2001 p.297, Tromsø: thigh-high fishing boots, all leather, well tarred &amp; cod-oiled, pegged sole, iron horseshoe heel.</p> <p>June Swann © 2017</p> | <p>See Pump.</p> |
|--|------------------|

Extract from June Swann's *Dictionary of Shoes*

From **Arne Focke**, Experimental archaeologist, <https://www.chaukenschmiede.de/>:

“Dear Mareille,

I have seen similar traces of tar/pitch on shoes of that time-frame. My findings were from the harbour city of Stade in northern Germany.

My impression is that sometimes shoes had these glue layers alongside their wooden nails. Practical experience, from making (mostly medieval) shoes for museums, tells me that these would make the shoes more watertight.

I have no idea if these were special sailor's shoes, or if there are similar inland finds. I hope I can shed a bit of light on your problem.”

From **Angela Middleton**, Archaeological Conservator, Historic England:

“Your enquiry reached me via the ALG. Have you taken a sample and analysed it, for example with FTIR (fourier transform infrared spectroscopy)?

I am currently working on 17th century leather shoes from the London wreck, which sank in 1665, in the Thames. We have noted a lot of tar residue around stitch holes. But one example also had tar-like residues between the layers of the sole. Our example is un-conserved; it looks yellow and has a real distinct smell of tar.

Has the shoe been conserved already and if so, using what?

If you have not got access to an FTIR, you could send me a little sample and I can run it here and compare it to what we have found on our shoes. There won't be any costs for this. But please be

aware, I am a conservator and not an organic chemist. So you won't be receiving a full analytical report. if the shoe and therefore the possible tar has been exposed to some conservation materials already, this will hamper the FTIR analysis, but we can give it a go.

My postal address is below. If you want to go ahead with this, please place the sample in either a glass vial or wrap it inside some aluminium foil.”

From **Marquita Volken**, Leatherworking specialist and calceologist, Gentle Craft Centre for Calceology, Lausanne, <http://shoemuseum.ch/>:

“Dear Mareille,

I worked on shoes from the SO-I shipwreck in the Netherlands when I was learning from Olaf Goubitz and there was similar tar or pine pitch in the sole layers also. When cleaning the layers of the sole the smell was quite strong! I have also found something similar in Roman sandals, though the smell of tar was less strong, probably due to age.

I think it was put there to help waterproof the soles and possibly to partially glue the pieces together while stitching. The first shoe I worked on that had the tar I thought it was odd and perhaps it was just some wax from the threads that had slipped in by accident but when three of the soles had it, one with quite a thick layer, it had to be deliberate.

Perhaps the ship wreck shoes are better preserved because of the water and silt? The Roman sandal with the tar was from a lake.”

The willingness of specialists to share their ex-



pertise is only too evident from these responses and Mareille was pleasantly surprised by the number of replies she received. Copies were forwarded to each of the respondents and have been reproduced here for the benefit of the ALG membership at large. If you have any more comments on the subject you can email Mareille directly at: [mareillearkesteijn@yahoo.com](mailto:mareillearkesteijn@yahoo.com)

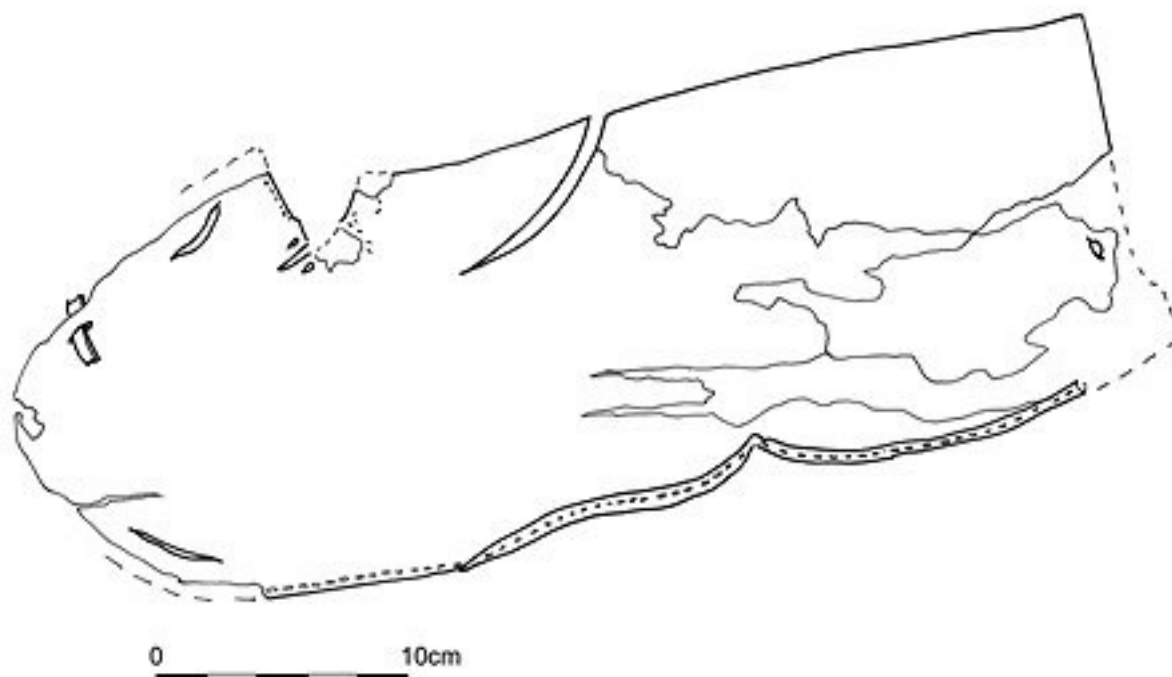
More recently, queries have been received on the following subjects:

Treatment for leathers damaged by salt water  
The dating of a shoe graffito on a fireplace  
Finds of leather pen cases or ink pots  
Identification of a maker's name on a boot  
Monastic rearing of goats for parchment  
Viking age tanning tools.

Once some responses have been received, and if these prove to be of general interest, we shall look at these in subsequent editions of the Newsletter. Just a reminder, finally, that enquiries of this kind are also regularly received and replied to on the ALG's facebook page:

[www.facebook.com/ArchaeologicalLeatherGroup/](http://www.facebook.com/ArchaeologicalLeatherGroup/)

The page has a wide international readership, so if you are happier with that format, please do post your question there.



## An early medieval oddity

by Carol van Driel-Murray

[cvandriel-murray@hetnet.nl](mailto:cvandriel-murray@hetnet.nl)

Can anyone suggest a working reconstruction for the shoe pictured below? It is one of a pair found in a well in the 7<sup>th</sup> century settlement of Oegstgeest, near Leiden, Netherlands. They are big adult ankle boots, about size 40, and both have a deliberate, curved, cut in the top of the leg. The entire upper seems to be pulled over to the side – there is a very short side seam, and the foot opening seems to be much too far over on the medial side to be able to close properly around the ankle.

Theoretically they look like some of the simple, open ankle boots from Haithabu or York, but testing the pattern shows that the very short side seam distorts the whole design, pulling it all over to one side and causing the top edge to dip down in a most unusual way. Though one side of the seam is damaged, it does not look as though much is missing, or that there could have been an extra piece.

I've tried various models but I can't get this to fit – even with the cut, the boot-leg is far too narrow for even a slim leg. The Merovingian wearer clearly also had problems with his shoes, because both vamps have torn loose from the sole,

and instead of cobbling the shoes properly, they have just tied up the loose pieces with leather strips. This is the right shoe, the left is in poorer condition but essentially the same. The shoes are turnshoe construction and the soles are slightly pointed at the back, fitting into a vent cut in the upper. There are a few stitch holes on the inside of the vamp opening, perhaps from attaching a lace, but no other seams suggesting the addition of extra pieces, reinforcements or edgings.

These shoes certainly don't resemble any of the familiar early types, and it all looks rather experimental. Or am I missing something? Has anyone any ideas, please?

## Gilt leather art in Córdoba loses Carmen Bernier

by Franklin Pereira

Researcher at the ARTIS Institute of Art History,  
Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon

frankleather@yahoo.com  
www.frankleather.com

In January last year Córdoba lost one more gilt leather artist, the renowned Carmen Bernier (1924–2017). In the late 1980s I met Manuel González, a leather worker from La Coruña (Spain) during a collective exhibition I was organizing in Oporto; he gave me the address of Carmen Bernier of Córdoba, with whom he had studied for a few months.

Eventually, during the 1991 Easter holidays, I took a night train to Madrid and then another to Córdoba. 24 hours later, I arrived in the city at the old Córdoba Central Station, nicknamed *La brillante* (The shining one). I knocked at the door of a big stone mansion in the tiny *Plaza de las Flores*, close to the great Umayyad mosque. Carmen Bernier invited me into a living room, the walls covered by gilt leather panels, and asked me how long was I going to stay in the city. When I said a week she offered me daily classes and so I stepped into her workshop, whose large window faced the cupola of the mosque/cathedral.

By the day of my departure, Carmen had given me the recipe and ingredients to cook the famous gold varnish for gilt leather and a small



Carmen Bernier in 1991, stamping a replica of a 16th century gilt leather frame.



Rafael Bernier with his daughters in 1956, during a leather art class. Carmen is the one on the left.

piece of her craftsmanship, tooled with the family brand: “Bernier Córdoba, Spain”. She also allowed me to photocopy a few books, one of which referred to 16th century contracts to export large quantities of gilt leather from Córdoba to Portugal, for the use of the King and nobility. Three such contracts became the basis for my book on the subject (Pereira, 2017), published with the sponsorship of Cordoba city council.



Detail of a gilt leather panel by Carmen Bernier and below, an embossed wallet given to her husband at the marriage ceremony.



In 1992 and 2003 I again returned to Córdoba, visiting her and continuing to study the documents in the city's library and archive.

Apart from gilt leather, Carmen also was a master of embossing, incised and mosaic leatherwork. Her father, Rafael Bernier, was an important local artist who revived the ancient gilt

leather techniques for which the city was famous during the Middle Ages after studying in Paris. These skills had been lost in Córdoba for a century or more. During the Spanish dictatorship his life was made very difficult but he moved ahead continually, teaching and creating.

This is a sad loss for Córdoba and for the history of leather art. Carmen Bernier, through her teaching, generous sharing of knowledge and support for my early writings, opened a pathway which I continue to explore.

F. Pereira (2017), De Córdoba para Portugal: el comercio de guadamecías en el siglo XVI, Chiado books.

*Postscript by the Editor:*

*Franklin Pereira regularly contributes to this Newsletter and publishes articles elsewhere on the subject of the medieval leather trades in Portugal. We were delighted to hear that in 2017 he was the first recipient of a new annual award by the organisers of the Spanish festivals of St Crispin and St Crispinian (patron saints of shoemakers and leatherworkers). The award recognises years of practical work, research and dissemination of knowledge in the area of leatherwork. It takes the physical form of a medal (in leather of course!) which can be seen below.*



Medal made by José Villar and Isaac Romero, and awarded by the *Comisión de Fiestas Patronales del Cuero*.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL LEATHER GROUP**  
**Treasurer's Report for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017**

**Income and Expenditure Account**

**Income**

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| Subscriptions 2017 (50 @ £10)                 | 500.00        |
| (33 @ £12)                                    | 396.00        |
| Subscriptions in advance 2018 (6 @ £10)       | 60.00         |
| (1 @ £12)                                     | 12.00         |
| Subscriptions in arrears (2 @ £10)            | 20.00         |
| Donations                                     | 10.14         |
| CD sales                                      | 5.00          |
| Japanese Leather Conference: Members 18 @ £35 | 630.00        |
| Non-members 10 @ £50                          | <u>500.00</u> |
|   | 2133.14       |

**Expenditure**

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| ALG Newsletter costs                            | 69.49        |
| Committee travel expenses                       | 44.30        |
| Paypal charges                                  | 24.36        |
| Warfare publication expenses                    | 162.45       |
| Japanese Leather Conference: Speakers' expenses | 247.70       |
| Refreshments                                    | 820.00       |
| AV equipment hire                               | 940.00       |
| Donation Festschrift publication                | 400.00       |
| Website charges                                 | <u>80.00</u> |
|   | 2788.30      |
| <br>Deficit for year                            | <br>655.16   |

**Balance**

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Balance as at 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2016     | 5451.62       |
| Deficit for year                                 | <u>655.16</u> |
|  | 4796.46       |
| <br>Closing cash balance                         | <br>4796.46   |
| Less subscriptions in advance                    | <u>72.00</u>  |
| <br>Balance as at 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2017 | <br>4724.46   |

**Reminder: Subscriptions**

The subscription year for the Archaeological Leather Group runs from 1 January to 31 December. Subscriptions for 2018 are therefore now due. They remain at £10 if paying by cash or cheque and £12 if you use PayPal. I would be grateful if members could complete the Membership Form found on our website: <http://www.archleathgrp.org.uk/Joining.htm> and follow the instructions there for getting it to me, along with their subscription. This enables me to keep our membership records up to date.

Many thanks,

Roy Thomson, Treasurer

## ALG and data Protection

You may be aware that the **General Data Protection Regulation** will come into effect in May. This regulation will apply across all EU member states. There is an exemption from registration for organisations such as ourselves but we are obliged to follow ‘Good Practice’.

The data the ALG holds on members comprises name, address, email address, special interests and whether they have paid their subscription. As one of the objects of the Group is to put members in touch with each other, it has been the practice to assume that these details can be circulated within the Group. Any member not wishing this to be the case has already had the opportunity to opt out by indicating this on the Membership Application form.

It has been decided that the present arrangements will continue but with the opportunity to opt out highlighted more prominently. It has also been decided that data on past members will be deleted after two years. We do not pass members’ details to third parties without their specific permission.

Roy Thomson

## A new book

### **Pele com Pele, Transfiguração & Transcendência**

by Ana Caldas and Franklin Pereira (Chiado Books, 2017)

‘This new book displays the results of the authors’ research and creative endeavour in the world of *gadamecí* - the most luxurious gilt leather of the medieval Iberian peninsula. They haven’t simply copied surviving works but have taken these as a starting point and instilled them with new visions and artistic possibilities. Other artefacts from the authors’ artistic journey are included, demonstrating how leather can create works of highly individual plastic expression when the imagination and hands are set alight.’

Purchasing information can be found here:

<https://www.chiadobooks.com/livraria/pele-com-pele>



Native American, Plains, Northern. Awl Case, early 19th century. Hide, beads, 11 1/4 x 2 3/4 in. (28.6 x 7 cm). Brooklyn Museum *via* Wikimedia Commons [No restrictions]

## Curious about Awl

Icelandic al  
 German Ahle  
 Dutch els  
 Latvian ilens  
 Lithuania yla  
 Hungarian ár  
 Catalan alena  
 Esperanto aleno

Latin subula  
 Greek σουβλί souvli  
 Romanian sula  
 Swedish syl  
 Danish syl  
 Croatian šilo  
 Czech šídlo  
 Polish szydło  
 Russian ШИЛО shilo

**Spanish** punzón, lezna  
French poinçon, alêne  
Italian punteruolo, lesina

**Portuguese** furador, sovela

**Estonian** naaskel  
Finnish naskali

Kurdish sêjin  
Uzbek bigiz  
Turkish tig  
Maori oka  
Welsh mynawyd, fynawyd

*Editor (with acknowledgements  
to Google Translate)*

**Ordinary Member** Vivi Lena Andersen,  
Museum of Copenhagen, Vesterbrogade 59,  
1620 Copenhagen V  
Tel +45 4095 0773  
email: vivila@gmail.com

**Ordinary Member** Diana Friendship-Taylor,  
'Toad-Hall', 86 Main Road, Hackleton,  
Northants, NN7 2AD  
Tel 01604 870312,  
email: dianaf-t@hotmail.com

**Ordinary Member** Dominique Mathieu,  
Association La Couenne, Presbytère  
31800 ASPRET-SARRAT, FRANCE  
Tel (outside France) (00-33) 9 53 98 28 28  
(within France) 09 53 98 28 28  
email: lacouenne@free.fr

## Archaeological Leather Group, Committee 2017-18



### Contact details:

**Chair** Yvette Fletcher, The Leather Conserva-  
tion Centre, University Campus, Boughton  
Green Road, Northampton,  
NN2 7AN  
Tel 01604 719766  
email: lcc@northampton.ac.uk

**Secretary** Quita Mould, 51 Whin Common  
Road, Denver, Downham Market, PE38 0DX  
Tel. 01366 384289  
email: quita@onetel.com

**Treasurer** Roy Thomson, 29 Herne Road,  
Oundle, Peterborough, PE8 4BS  
Tel 01832 272048  
email: roythomson@greenbee.net

**Newsletter Editor** Sue Winterbottom,  
48 Lyndhurst Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 4BP  
Tel 01782 833213,  
email: sue@winterbottom.eu

**Meetings Co-ordinator** Angela Middleton,  
Archaeological Conservator, Historic England,  
Fort Cumberland, Fort Cumberland Road,  
Portsmouth, PO4 9LD  
Tel 023 9285 6787  
email: Angela.Middleton@HistoricEngland.org.uk