

# BAHS Quick Guide to Finds Processing

## Bulk Finds

These are finds recorded and bagged as a material group, such as pottery, flint, stone, CBM (ceramic building material such as tile and brick), ferrous metals, glass, animal bone, clay pipe, etc. See overleaf for **SMALL FINDS**.

Do not mix groups of material from different contexts. Prior to processing, all finds trays (or bags if used) must be clearly labelled (using black permanent marker pens) to avoid any confusion. Labels should show the site details (code and year), trench number and context number. Make sure labels are always securely attached to trays.

Before processing, check the contents of the finds tray and any fragile items or metal finds that should not be washed should be removed, placed in a labelled bag or container and stored to one side.

Individual animal bones that are likely to fall apart during processing should initially be always bagged up individually (all fragments in the same bag). This is particularly important for mandibles with teeth. Once washed and dried, they can be again placed within individual bags (and stored within an outer bag if more animal bones are available from the same context).

Bagging of processed Bulk Finds should be seen as an interim process. It is not necessary to apply detailed analysis at this stage, but sufficient to bag according to material type.

### Key points for Bulk Finds:

- **Do not mix material from different contexts – ensure all containers are always labelled.**
- **Do not mix material that has to be kept dry with that to be washed.**
- **Do not dispose of any finds without first checking the ‘discard policy’.**
- **Wash unworked bone, CBM, clay pipe, modern glass, pottery and flint (but see next bullet points).**
- **Do not wash wood, metalwork, daub, prehistoric or Saxon pottery, or any pottery that appears ‘crumbly’.**
- **Do not wash if material has surviving traces of paint, pigments or lime wash, or sooting, or food residues are present (for pot sherds with food residues wrap in foil and place in a bag).**
- **Do not soak large objects of CBM in water - it may be better to dry brush them.**
- **Do not wash slag which has any burnt clay or traces of furnace lining, hearth or crucible attached, or has a ‘bubbly’ appearance.**
- **If an object crumbles, erodes, or flakes on washing (e.g. glass or shell): STOP!**
- **Use frequently changed lukewarm water and soft toothbrushes (do not scrub so vigorously that surface detail is removed or surfaces scarred and do not try to remove burning or staining from bones).**
- **Dry clean with a soft brush if appropriate (but do not brush the edges of pottery being kept dry as this will damage the texture and make analysis more difficult).**
- **Washed finds should be spread out (not heaped) on clearly labelled trays lined with newspaper and left to dry naturally (bear in mind drying can sometimes take days, especially for CBM).**
- **Bag fully dried materials in perforated bags (fragments of ferrous metals may need to be packed with silica gel but remember ferrous items of note are classified as Small Finds). Different metal types should be kept separate from each other.**
- **Count and weigh each material group (except wood) as it is bagged. (Daub and industrial debris weigh, but do not count).**
- **Bags should be labelled, using black permanent marker pen, with the following:**
  - **Site name/Project Code.**
  - **Year of excavation (if relevant).**
  - **Trench Number.**
  - **Context number (written within parentheses).**
  - **Material group (and type if applicable) e.g. ‘CBM – Tile’ or ‘Glass – Window’**
  - **The quantity and weight as appropriate.**
  - **Place a second waterproof label inside.**
  - **If more than one bag of same material group is required then label this, e.g. Bag 1 of 2.**
- **Finally, store bags of the same material group together in context number order within an outer cardboard box which has been allocated a number from the Box Index Form.**

**If you are uncertain about anything always ask.  
Further information can be found in the BAHS Finds Processing Guide.**

# Small Finds

These are items of special note and include worked bone, worked antler, animal bone groups, beads, preserved leather or textiles, most metal items such as coins and rings, metal alloys such as bronze, complete vessels made of pottery or glass, architectural stone, flint tools, amber, jet, shale, etc. See overleaf for **BULK FINDS**.

Small Finds are recorded individually and allocated a unique number from the Small Finds Register (in which basic information about the Small Find is recorded). Occasionally one number is given to a group of pieces, such as a few potsherds found close together and apparently from the same vessel, but items such as animal bone groups, coins or beads should always have separate numbers even if found in groups (assemblages).

Small Finds are individually bagged or boxed and the container labelled on the outside (the Small Finds number being conventionally written within a triangle). A waterproof Tyvek label duplicating the information should also be placed within the container.

## **Key points for Small Finds:**

- **Record individually using a Small Finds number (from the Small Finds Register).**
- **Do not wash.**
- **Minimal dry cleaning with a soft brush if appropriate.**
- **Do not mark the find itself (unless it is an architectural stone).**
- **Do nothing that would compromise eventual conservation work or cause damage.**
- **Do not allow organic material, amber, jet, shale or some types of glass to dry out.**
- **Non-organic materials should be left to completely dry out naturally before bagging in perforated bags. Metal objects may need to be packed with silica gel.**
- **Protect fragile or delicate finds by safely packing in a crystal plastic box rather than bagging.**
- **Labels should have the following information:**
  - **Site name/Project Code**
  - **Year of excavation (if relevant)**
  - **Trench Number**
  - **Context number (written within parentheses)**
  - **Small Find number (written within a triangle)**
  - **Material group and type, e.g. bone pin**
  - **Initials of finder and date**
- **Store within an outer box along with other Small Finds in Small Find number order (never mix or store with Bulk Finds).**

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### Material Groups and Types

- Animal Bone (including teeth): all un-worked bone including fish - where possible specify animal types (e.g. Animal Bone – cow or bovine).
- Antler.
- Ceramic Building Materials (CBM): Baked and Fired clay, Brick, Tiles, Plaster, Concrete, Mortar, Opus Signinum, architectural materials.
- Building Materials (including worked stone and wood).
- Unclassified.
- Copper and alloys (including brass and bronze).
- Environmental Samples: Processed flot residues, charred plant remains, faunal remains, charcoal, plant remains, mollusca, insect remains, charred foodstuff.
- Flint.
- Glass: Vessel, Window, Objects (e.g. Beads), Other, Unclassified.
- Gold and alloys.
- Human Bone (including teeth).
- Industrial residues: Includes clinker, hammer scale, slag and other waste products from metal working.
- Iron and alloys.
- Lead.
- Leather.
- Pewter.
- Pipe Clay: Clay pipe, Figurine.
- Pottery: Includes Figurines, Lamps, Crucibles – where possible specify pottery type (e.g. Pottery – Samian).
- Resin: Amber.
- Shell.
- Silver and alloys.
- Stone: Jet, Shale, Slate (specify other identified stones), Unclassified.
- Tin.
- Wood.
- Worked Bone.
- Worked Stone: Objects (e.g. tools including debitage).