

Shoes and bags



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'Turn' shoe

'Turn' shoe — called a 'turn' shoe because the whole shoe was made on a last and sewn together so that all seams and stitching were on the outside. The shoe was then soaked in water until the leather was soft and pliable before turning the shoe inside out. Once inside out, the leather regained its shape and stiffness as it dried. The shoe is fastened using a leather thing threaded through holes in the 'collars' at the ankle, and this type of shoe would have been worn by people at many different levels of society.



How do we know about turn shoes?

Turn shoes have been found during archaeological excavations, and there are many illustrations of them in medieval manuscripts. This turn shoe is copied from an early C13th example.

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'Bag' shoe

'Bag' shoe — called a 'bag' shoe because it all pulls together rather like a drawstring bag. It is a simple construction made from one piece of leather, so the only sewing involved is at the heel (unless an extra sole was sewn on as in this example). This style of shoe would have been worn by people of lower status in the medieval period, and monks.



How do we know about bag shoes?

This type of shoe has been used across Europe throughout history from the Bronze Age right through to the 20th century by various social classes. This example is based on a shoe found in Dorestad, Netherlands.



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Leather coin purse & Edward I coins

Leather coin purse & Edward I coins — the leather this purse is made from is very soft and fine and would have been more expensive than the thicker leather used for less expensive purses. It has a fine leather thong which draws the top of the purse together and would also have been used to hang the purse from a belt.

The coins are a selection of whole and cut coins. The coins were cut because a penny was the lowest value coin and once ordinary people started to be paid in coins and buy goods in coins (rather than exchanging goods and services) they needed lower value coins than a penny. People started cutting pennies in half and into quarters so that they could buy low value goods and give change.

At the same time, many coins had been 'clipped'. Coins were made from silver, and people clipped metal from the edges of the coins and melted the clipped metal to make other things. This was illegal and had the effect of making British coins an unreliable currency, as coins were supposed to be of a certain weight which meant their value was in the metal itself. Modern coins are not made of metal which is of value in itself, they are a guarantee of payment.

As a result of coin clipping and dishonest men working in the Royal Mint illegally adding alloy to the silver coins, the British economy was in crisis between 1275 and 1278. In 1279 Edward I sacked the dishonest men at the Mint, and introduced new coins — round farthings in 1279, and round half pennies in 1280. Cut coins were withdrawn from circulation at this time.



How do we know about leather purses and Edward I coins?

Leather coin purses are described and illustrated in medieval manuscripts, and coins have been found during archaeological digs. Medieval manuscripts record the 'recoining' undertaken by Edward I in the late C13th.

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Belt / girdle bag

Belt / Girdle bag — in the days before clothes had pockets sewn into them, everybody wore leather belts or girdles (girdles are low slung belts worn by women) with pouches or bags hanging from them. This replica leather pouch was of a commonly worn type, with belt loops.

Leather pouches or bags attached to belts were in common use in Britain from the late 1100s until at least 1500. There were variations in design, and also in the type of leather used (goatskin and pigskin were used as well as leather made from cowhide). Fabric pouches and purses called Aumonieres, used for keeping alms in by nobles, were also used at this time.



How do we know about belt bags and pouches?

Many medieval illustrations show similar belt bags, which were used to carry small items. There are several collections of aumonieres in European museums.

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Leather cases / budgets

Leather cases / budgets — these cylindrical cases, called budgets, were made by stitching the leather, then soaking it in water, then moulding it around a wooden former. Once dry the case was covered in thin goat or calf skin. This makes a case which is quite waterproof and strong enough to protect the contents.



How do we know about leather budgets?

Budgets are shown in manuscripts dating between 1100AD and 1600AD.