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Bearsden

A Roman Fort on the Antonine Wall

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Chapter 19

LEATHER

DENNIS B GALLAGHER

19.1 INTRODUCTION

Seventeen fragments of leather were recovered during the excavation. All the identifiable leather fragments of nailed footwear belong to a type of shoe known as a *calceus*. These were similar in form to the modern shoe, in which the upper is cut separate from the soles and attached to them by means of a lasting seam. This contrasts with the other form of military footwear, the *caliga*, where the sole and upper is constructed from one piece of leather (cf Groenmann-van Wateringe 1967: 129–46). The *calceus* normally was a light form of shoe, but the Bearsden examples strengthen the suggestion that during the Antonine period a heavily nailed version of this shoe type replaced the *caliga* as military footwear in northern Britain (Rhodes 1980: 114). Other nailed versions of *calceus* have been found in Antonine contexts at Bar Hill (Keppie 1975: 78), Rough Castle (MacIvor et al 1980: fig 16–17) and Hardnott (Charlesworth & Thornton 1973: 150).

The smaller sole fragment, although incomplete, illustrates aspects of the methods of manufacture. Two of the inner soles (19.2.3 and 6) have slots for thongs. These were intended to hold the several layers of sole together prior to nailing (Keppie 1975: 68; Rhodes 1980: 115). The placing of the slots indicates that the thongs were placed in a diamond pattern, similar to *calcei* from Hardnott (Charlesworth & Thornton 1973: 142–5).

The two more complete lower sole fragments are heavily nailed in six rows, with a break for the arch of the foot (a Type c nailed shoe according to the classification of Rhodes 1980: 107). There are similar nail patterns from Rough Castle (MacIvor et al 1980: fig 16–17), Bar Hill (Keppie 1975a: 78, no 57), Hardnott (Charlesworth & Thornton 1973, 142–3) and London (Rhodes 1980: 104, 591). The hobnail heads at Bearden were sub-circular, most being in the region of 8mm–10mm in diameter. The complete lower shoe (19.2.1) showed considerable wear on the outer left heel, a normal wear pattern. The dense grouping of nailheads on the heel indicates that the wear necessitated the insertion of new hobnails between the shanks of the worn originals.

Little survives of shoe uppers. There are two examples of heel stiffeners (19.2.1 and 4), which were used to strengthen the quarters. The thicker leather of the heel stiffener of 1 ensured



Illustration 19.1
A leather shoe.



Illustration 19.2
Leather shoes.

the survival of a small part of the quarter of that shoe. This was constructed of very fine leather, different from the heavy leather of the lower shoe. Its quality is one factor in explaining the poor survival, on some sites, of shoe uppers in comparison with bottom units (Rhodes 1980: 100–1).

19.2 CATALOGUE

1. Left foot consisting of four layers of sole, a heel stiffener and a small fragment of the quarters of an upper (illus 19.1 and 19.2.1). Present length 245mm. The outer sole has six rows of hobnails plus grain to flesh stitching around its perimeter. The nails display normal wear on the outer side of the heel. The heel stiffener is tucked in between the outer sole and the lowest of the inner soles. The lower part of the quarters, made of fine leather, survives against the heel stiffener. The inner soles are bound together with a lasting seam, with an average stitch length of 11mm, which also held the uppers. The uppermost sole is penetrated by a number of hobnails, some of which have had their ends hammered flat. Allowing for 10% shrinkage (Rhodes 1980: 102), the shoe is an adult size 7.
NK78AS; middle west ditch, silt below organic layer.
2. A fragment of the fore part of an outer sole with holes made by six rows of hobnails plus the impressions of some of their sub-circular heads (illus 19.2.2).
3. A forepart of a left inner sole with the fragment of the toe of an outer sole. Grain to flesh stitching around the perimeter and two pairs of thong slots, one pair on each side of the sole. Flesh side uppermost (illus 19.2.3).
4. Heel fragment of outer sole, with holes from hobnails, and part of a heel stiffener. (illus 19.2.4)
5. Two adjoining fragments of inner sole with flesh side uppermost. Holes from grain to flesh stitching along the edge and also from hobnails (illus 19.2.5).
6. Inner sole of right foot with flesh side uppermost. Perimeter with grain to flesh stitching plus irregular tacking across the width of the heel. There are two pairs of thong slots, one pair on each side of the sole. The lower side has the impression of hobnails (illus 19.2.6).
7. Fragment of the left side of an upper of a *calceus*, similar to Keppie type B (Keppie 1975: 70–1), with stubs of parallel ribbing, margin scalloped.
NK78AA; inner west ditch, bottom of organic layer.