

Roman Middlewich Teachers' Pack

Making shoes for the Romans

Activity sheet 6

Making a simple Cabatina:

The leather used is most likely to have come from a cow, goat or deer. It would have been quite thick and have been prepared using a simple vegetable tanning process.

After the leather has been cut to shape, the shoe is created by cutting a number of slits around the edge of the leather, thoroughly soaking the leather in water, threading a string through the slits and drawing the shoe into shape around a last. When the leather is dry the last is removed and the shoe maintains the shape.

Differences from modern shoes

Roman shoes would often have been individually tailored - even simple shoes have been found with a high degree of decoration, created through punching and stamping the leather. The footwear would also have been available in roughly the same range of sizes as our shoes are today, although the Romans had, on average, smaller feet than we do. There was, however, little protection from the elements built into the footwear as water was expected to flow through the shoe, rather than be kept out.

Better shoes

The Romans had a great influence on footwear construction and brought the industry on by leaps and bounds in Britain. Their most revolutionary introduction was the concept of nailed construction whereby nails were hammered through the layers of leather onto a metal last creating a solid and hardwearing shoe.

Activity: You are a maker of leather footwear, which you sell to Roman troops in Middlewich. Produce an illustrated flyer or brochure advertising your new range.