

FINDS CARE · FREE RESOURCE

Safe Finds Cleaning Decision Chart

A step-by-step decision guide to help you decide whether to clean a find, leave it alone, or seek advice.

What's inside

- ✓ Clear, practical steps you can use straight away
- 📖 Written for real UK detecting, not theory
- 📄 Plain-English guidance, checked against official sources
- ★ Free to print, keep and share



**Written by
detectorists**



**Checked against
UK guidance**



**Free to print and
keep**

First: is it dangerous?

Ordnance, shells, munitions or weapons, leaking batteries or hazardous containers: **do not clean or handle. Move away and, for ordnance or weapons, call the police.** Suspected human remains: stop and contact the police.

Work down these decisions in order. Each colour is labelled, so it works in black and white too.

1. Could it be legally reportable?

Could it be Treasure or archaeologically significant? **If yes or unsure: STOP.** Photograph it, record the findspot privately, and seek advice before cleaning. Do not clean a possible Treasure find before reporting it.

2. Is the material known?

If you are not reasonably confident of the material (gold, silver, copper alloy, lead, iron, or a modern alloy), treat it as unidentified and do not clean.

3. Is it wet or waterlogged?

Waterlogged wood, leather or textile must NOT be allowed to dry. Keep it wet as found in clean water and contact a conservator. Drying can destroy it.

4. Is the surface flaking or powdery?

If it is flaking, powdery, cracked or actively corroding (surface breaking down), isolate it in a stable place and seek conservation advice. Do not attempt to clean.

5. Is cleaning even necessary?

Most finds do not need cleaning. If it is identified, stable and cleaning is genuinely needed, the safest first action is careful **dry** soft-brushing, or leaving it untouched. Soft brushing is NOT safe for gilded, painted, plated, composite or fragile surfaces: for those, seek advice.

When a path ends in 'seek advice'. Contact a conservator, or your Finds Liaison Officer (England & Wales), the Treasure Trove Unit (Scotland), or National Museums NI, depending on where you are.

When in doubt, stop

Cleaning is one-way. You can always clean later on advice; you cannot undo damage.

This resource is provided for general information and personal record-keeping. Rules, official guidance and access arrangements can change. Check the current requirements for the place where you intend to detect. See the full Cleaning & Storage Checklist for handling and storage.

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