

detachment from their skins (by the leatherworker) before their eventual use as raw material in the construction of the knuckle bone floor. A clue as to what this process may have been is provided in the contemporary account by Parkinson¹⁵ in the context of the “shank bones of sheep” (more accurately, the metapodials) used in the construction of retaining borders of garden flowerbeds, which he says had first been “well cleansed and boyled, to take out the fat from them”. The Tyers Gate bones may therefore have been purposely chopped or broken into “halves” to facilitate extraction of the grease contained in their marrow cavities. Given the very large quantities of bones represented at Tyers Gate, it seems highly unlikely they derived from a domestic source (i.e. household refuse – from the boiling of sheep’s feet to make a meat broth) – rather, they must have derived from a process carried out on a commercial scale, as would be the case in a leatherworker’s premises where sheep feet were boiled in quantity in vats in order to supply the “neatsfoot oil” needed for leather dressing.¹⁶

Discussion

The excavation has revealed evidence for the development of the site from the late medieval period through to the 19th century. Marsh drainage from at least the 15th century enabled the area to be occupied during the 16th century by the expanding tanning industry, and the site appears to have been occupied by tawyers. The excavation area itself was later occupied by two buildings, one of which fronted onto Tyers Gate. The earliest map to show the road is Rocque’s map of 1746, but it may have existed for sometime before this, merely being omitted from earlier maps,¹⁷ as the earliest elements of these buildings may indicate a late-16th-century date for their construction.

Letter

I see that in footnote 1 of Chris Pickard’s article *Excavations at 25-34 Cockspur Street and 6-8 Spring Gardens* in *London Archaeologist* 10, no. 2, he explains the name Cockspur Street as originating in the making of spurs for cock fighting. I too have heard that story, but I wonder if there is any hard evidence for it? The way the street forks

This development may represent the expansion of domestic housing from the main Bermondsey Street frontage, established by the end of the medieval period, into undeveloped areas to the east and west reflecting the growing pressure of London’s expanding population. Although the function of the buildings is difficult to establish, the layout of the Building A fronting onto Tyers Gate seems typical of a townhouse with a narrow frontage exploited by extending the building as far to the rear as possible. The more fragmentary western building, which did not front onto Tyers Gate, may have been built for commercial or industrial use rather than domestic occupation. Both buildings were perhaps associated with tanners’ or tawyers’ yards located to the rear. Possible evidence for the continued involvement with this industry during the 18th century was found in the form of a knuckle bone floor, although this material was presumably also readily available to those residents of Bermondsey not involved in the industry.

Pottery and clay tobacco pipes recovered from the site assisted with the broad dating of the building sequence, although the quantities recovered were relatively small, fragmentary and comprised largely of either residual material or had wide date ranges. However, the finds were generally typical of domestic occupation during the periods represented and not dissimilar to larger assemblages recovered from other excavations in the vicinity.

The importance of sheep in the local economy during the 18th and 19th centuries may be reflected in nearby street names such as Lamb Street to the south. This road appears as Lamb Alley on Horwood’s 1792-99 map, having been shown on Rocque’s 1746 map as Swan Alley. Horwood’s map also shows a ‘wool staplers’ (wool seller) to the north of the site, a trade

off Pall Mall is somewhat like the shape of the spur on a cock’s leg. Here in Norfolk we have a road name, Cut Throat Lane, which was used in the 18th century for roads that cut off a sharp bend; but it has given rise to various myths about highwaymen.

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