

Fig. 1: Site location plan and location of investigation areas 1 to 3

A suburban site in West Smithfield

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Introduction

The Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) carried out an archaeological excavation and watching brief at Weddel House, 13–21 West Smithfield and 22–29 Hosier Lane between February 1999 and February 2000.¹ An evaluation in 1997–8 had showed that no archaeological remains survived in deeply basemented areas but that the yard to the north of Weddel House had good archaeological potential.² The main excavations took place in the yard at areas 1–3 (Fig. 1). The site archive is available for consultation under the site code WSI97.³ The archaeological work was funded by the Haberdashers' Livery Company.

Archaeological and historical background

The Smithfield area formed part of the hinterland of Roman *Londinium*, lying to the north-west of the earliest settlement and the later walled town.

Although some evidence of early 1st- and 2nd-century buildings has been recorded in the vicinity, this was restricted to a corridor along the main east-west Roman road leading to Newgate. Antiquarian observations and modern excavations have shown that the land immediately around the site formed part of the western cemetery of Roman London. Excavations at St Bartholomew's Hospital in 1979 uncovered at least 20 late Roman inhumations,⁴ and an excavation at 1–4 Giltspur Street in 1989 revealed over 100 inhumations of a similar date.⁵ Inhumations and cremations have also been found to the west of the Fleet River.⁶ Excavations at 8–22 Smithfield Street included a few fragments of redeposited human bone from medieval pits,⁷ while investigations at 2–12 Hosier Lane also revealed residual human bone.⁸

There is very little archaeological evidence from the area in the early medieval period. St Bartholomew's was

founded in 1123 and there are 12th-century documentary references to the 'smooth-field', to the west of the priory, being an area used for market trading, particularly in horses and cattle.⁹ Recent investigation of the post-Roman development of the Cripplegate fort area, to the east of the site, suggests that the association of the area with cattle may be longstanding and stretch back in time to the Saxon period. The main east-west road from Cripplegate was called 'Addle Street' (Old English for Cow-dung Street) and may represent a drove road¹⁰ which led directly towards West Smithfield. Growth of the City and construction of the monastic precinct of St Bartholomew's interfered with use of this thoroughfare and the west gate at Cripplegate eventually went out of use and was blocked.

To the west of the site the River Fleet was used for transportation and as a sewer for urban and industrial waste. The central area of Smithfield remained largely undeveloped into the later



Fig. 2: The West Smithfield area as shown on Rocque's map of 1754

medieval period, with the land used for public events such as tournaments and jousts. Smithfield was the site of the encampment of the rebels during the Peasants Revolt of 1381 and the scene of Wat Tyler's fatal meeting with Richard II and Mayor William Walworth. The area was a place of public hangings until the gallows were moved to Tyburn in the 14th century, although burnings of witches and heretics continued until the 17th century.¹¹

Post-medieval maps of the area show increasing urban development around the open market area and Smithfield was largely unaffected by the Great Fire of 1666, which halted at Pie Corner on the junction of Giltspur Street and Cock Lane. Rocque's mid-18th-century map shows the area between West Smithfield and Hosier Lane to be heavily developed (Fig. 2), with yards and inns including The Greyhound, George and White Swan lying within the site area. Densely populated areas surrounding the market became

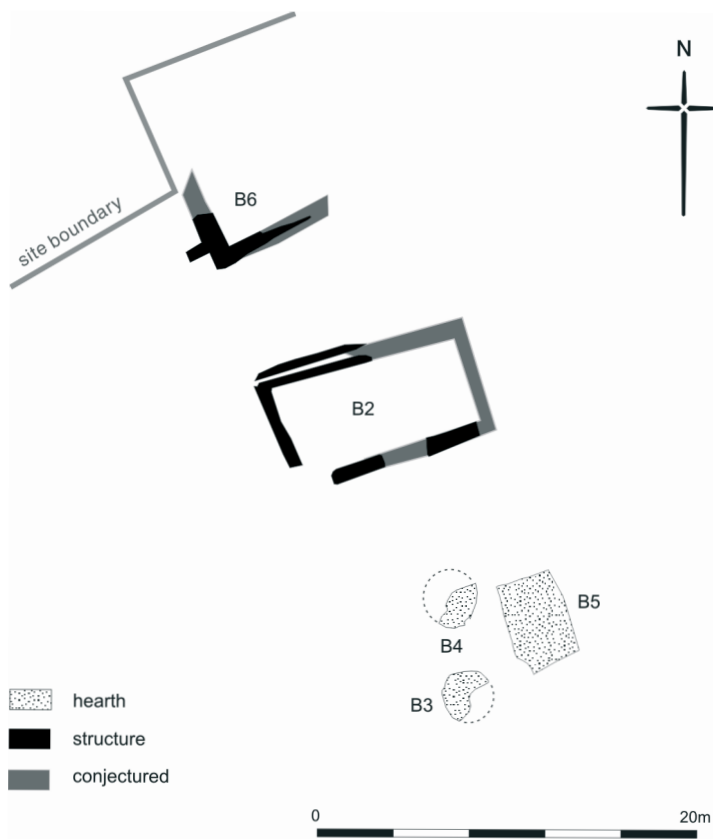


Fig. 3: Medieval buildings 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 (period 3, phase 1)

notorious ‘rookeries’ or slums.¹²

The street plan and character of the area was radically changed by the development of the Farringdon railway terminus in 1859 and completion of the new meat market in 1868, but the Weddel House site largely escaped alteration. Trade and property directories record a variety of trades and functions in the 19th-century buildings on the site, many of them linked to the meat market and including saddlers, butchers’ cutlers, cattle dealers and hay and straw salesmen. Other trades include builders, carvers and gilders, watch and clock manufacturers, boot-makers and provision merchants.

Weddel House was described as ‘a hulking mass of offices built in 1907 for the meat trade’.¹³ Despite heavy bombing during World War II the buildings escaped the severe damage which destroyed adjacent blocks. The site has been redeveloped as a new Livery hall for the Haberdashers’ Company, designed by Sir Michael Hopkins & Partners and constructed by Holloway White Allom. The former frontage of Weddel House which wraps around the hall has been converted into residential and retail units.

Results of the fieldwork

The site lies 800 m north of the Thames, on the eastern down-slope of the Fleet valley. The natural geology is London Clay overlain by second terrace

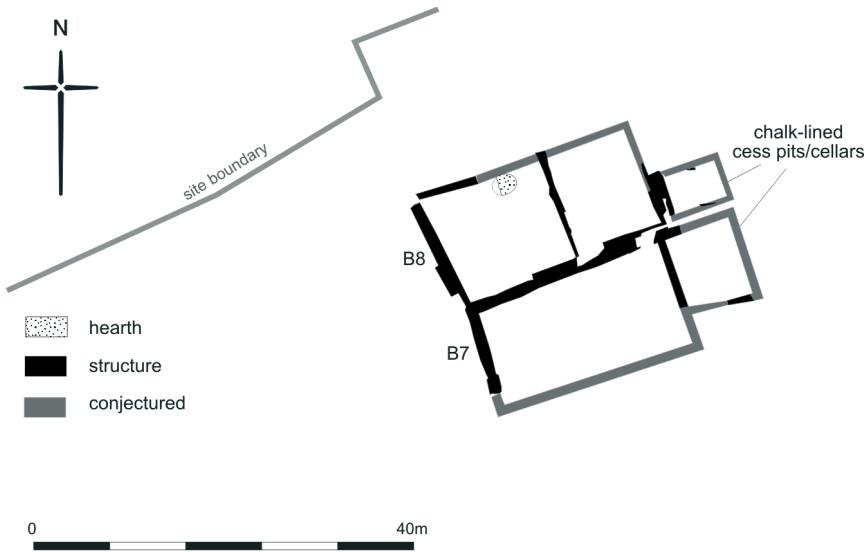


Fig. 4: medieval buildings 7 and 8

Thames river gravels capped by brickearth. Truncated natural gravel was recorded at 12.71 m OD in Area 2 and at 15.55 m OD in evaluation TP 3, but the untruncated natural surface may originally have been fairly level.

Roman features in an external area

Evidence for early Roman activity was restricted to a timber-lined well and two rubbish or quarry pits located in excavation area 1. The pottery from these features is dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and the vessel forms suggest kitchen-related functions. The area appears to have remained external in the later Roman period but there was no evidence of Roman inhumations or cremations.

Medieval quarrying and buildings

There was no evidence of post-Roman activity at the site before the medieval period, when gravel quarries were established. Pottery recovered from quarry backfills were generally dated to c. 1230–1350, with some early 15th-century pottery associated with the final backfilling of the larger pits. The pottery includes jugs, cooking pots and pipkins, bowls and cups. A fragmented assemblage of animal bone from the backfills was largely composed of the major domesticates, including chicken and goose as well as wild game, hare and rabbit.

The backfilled quarry pits were sealed by general levelling and the establishment of gardens or yards and rubbish pits before the establishment of buildings in the mid- to late 13th century (Fig. 3). The fragmentary remains included a timber structure seen in section (Building 1; not illustrated), a small rectangular building with chalk, ragstone and greensand foundations, a peg-tile floor and evidence of an internal stone wall line and a porch or lean-to (Building 2), and an internal area associated with a hearth (Building 3). A sample from the hearth contained moderate amounts of cereal grain and charred plant material. Oat grains and smaller amounts of rye, barley and free-threshing wheat were present and the dominance of oats may be associated with the use of animal fodder at Smithfield’s Market. The range of cereals is very similar to those found nearby at 2–12 Hosier Street.¹⁴

Two 14th-century hearth structures



Fig. 5: View of the arched foundations of Building 7



Fig. 6: baluster-shaped drinking jug in London-type ware

provide evidence for Buildings 4 and 5, although the absence of any evidence of walls suggests these may have been open-air cook-shops similar to those found at Queen Street.¹⁵ Truncated chalk and Reigate foundations in test pit 3B provide evidence for Building 6 at the northern limit of the site area (Fig. 3).

In the late 14th or early 15th centuries Buildings 2–5 were demolished. The faunal assemblage from deposits in Open Area 5 is mainly composed of pig, bird and fish bones, including a very young piglet, large chickens interpreted as capons, and game species including woodcock, thrush, snipe and swan. Most of the fish-bones were eel and clupeid (herring family), from riverine and estuarine fisheries respectively. The high status and variety of food types may indicate waste from a special meal. A medieval delicacy known as a ‘cokagrys’ involved the spitting and roasting of the sewn together fore and hind halves of a capon and a sucking pig.¹⁶

Two larger structures were established on the cleared area (Buildings 7 and 8; Fig. 4). The westernmost wall of Building 7 was carried on chalk foundation arches (Fig. 5), a construction technique widely employed in church extensions, halls and better-built private houses.¹⁷ Fragmentary evidence of internal partitions and floors also survived. The

most notable find is a complete baluster-shaped drinking jug in London-type ware, which dates from c. 1270–1350 (Fig. 6). Fills in a chalk-lined cellar or cesspit at the east end of Building 7 included the remains of grape, apple/crab apple, blackberry/raspberry, fig and elderberry, along with fly puparia, a common indicator of human waste. Animal bone from Building 7 may also indicate high-status occupation: a mix of major mammal and bird domesticates, dominated by cattle and chicken respectively, and a few wild game species including fallow deer and partridge were recovered. Notably, one of the cattle bones was from a young calf, almost certainly representing a veal cut.

Building 8 was a rebuild of Building 2 and originally consisted of a small rectangular structure with a central hearth. Renovations and rebuilds included extensions towards the north, where a drain was built, and to the south to butt up against Building 7. Structural details included an internal partition and associated cellars or chalk-lined pits located to the east. An external area to the north of Building 8 (Open Area 6) may have been divided by a boundary ditch or drain, later replaced by a fence line. The cellars or pits went out of use by 1440 and disuse of the buildings may be associated with demolition material recorded in Area 1 (Open Area 7).

Post-medieval occupation

Following the disuse of Building 8, two unusual double-walled circular structures, up to 3 m in diameter internally, were built within its shell (Fig. 7). The structures were fairly short-lived and their function is uncertain, although they may have been vats of some kind. Staining was noted on the walls of the western structure. The double-walled design may have been suitable for a cold store – possibly for dairy products from the nearby market. Few datable finds were recovered from the structures, but their construction suggest a post-Dissolution, pre-Great Fire date, when reused Reigate stone may have come from the Priory.

Following the demolition of the circular structures the area was used for rubbish and cess disposal (Open Area 8). The large chalk-lined pit east of Building 7 was relined with brick and its lower fills contained late 16th- or 17th-century stoneware vessels, including one with a face mask and three with heraldic medallions which date the remodelled feature to after 1550. 17th- and 18th-century ceramics were also recovered from nearby rubbish pits.

The final extant activity was represented by late 18th- and early 19th-century brick-built drains and structures (Open Area 9). The brick-lined cesspit east of Building 7 continued in use and its later fills contained animal bone from a wide



Fig. 7: View of the circular structures associated with Building 8

array of food and non-food species. Several cattle leg bones had been sawn into sections, probably for stew or soup bones. Other food remains included seeds from mulberry, wild strawberry, plum, currant fruits and spices. The food remains were all common in London at this time¹⁸ and are similar to those found at 2–12 Hosier Lane.¹⁹

The latest cesspit fills contained an important group of 102 vessels (Fig. 8), probably representing the clearance of an affluent household. They mainly comprise tableware dated to 1807–20, although some items were apparently treasured through two or more generations before disposal. A few tea-bowls and saucers match but there are no sets. Twelve chamber pots include nine in creamware, one in Surrey-Hampshire border redware and two in Staffordshire black-glazed ware. A stool pan and two small ointment pots are in Staffordshire salt-glazed stoneware. Forms associated with food preparation include a jar and a flared bowl in post-medieval redware, a stoneware butterpot from the Midlands, and a small pipkin with pouring lip at 90°

degrees to the ladle handle in Surrey-Hampshire border redware. A bowl and jug in banded Mocha ware and bowls in banded creamwares might also have been used in the kitchen, while a chicken feeder suggests the availability of fresh eggs.

The bulk of the group comprises tablewares associated with tea drinking (Fig. 9). Pearlwares are the dominant type, followed by creamwares and Chinese porcelain. English porcelain is limited to a shallow bowl, probably for slops, from Worcester. The earlier pearlwares, dating from the 1760s to 1780s, are hand-painted. Some have polychrome floral designs, while others are in blue and white and include two scenes with boats, one at sea and the other in a harbour with sampans (not illustrated). The later 18th- and 19th-century pieces are transfer-printed, initially in the Chinese style, and most have standard landscape designs showing temples. A bowl and the cream jug have the buffalo pattern used by several Staffordshire potters, including Spode and Minton. The design features the philosopher Lao-Tzu

riding a buffalo across a Chinese landscape.²⁰

The imported porcelain includes a pair of tea-bowls with decoration in blue, a large bowl with floral decoration in blue inside and brown outer surface (Batavian ware), a bowl and a saucer in the Imari style and two pieces in the *famille rose* styles, one showing a girl on a tightrope. A teapot with decoration in red is probably from Iran.²¹

Two later wares, a near pair, combine Chinese-style designs on the outside, but show a pair of lovers in the English style inside the bowl and has the number '15' or '51' on the underside of the base. None of the pieces have identifiable factory marks, but a few others have marks in blue on the base, while the sauceboat has the impressed number '1', probably a tally mark for the workman rather than the consumer²² (Fig. 10).

The house clearance assemblage also included drinking and jelly glasses made from thick, colourless lead glass with unpolished pontil marks on the bases (Fig. 11). They were almost



Fig. 8: pottery from the 19th-century household clearance group- Back row (left to right): chamber pots in creamware, Surrey-Hampshire border redware and Staffordshire black-glazed ware; London stoneware tankard.
 Foreground, left side: creamware coffee cup, jug and tea-bowl; Staffordshire salt-glazed stoneware ointment pots.
 Centre: tea-bowls and saucers in painted creamware, jug and bowls in banded creamware and mocha ware, painted creamware lid.
 Right: pearlware plates with shell edge rims in blue and green; Surrey-Hampshire border redware pipkin with ladle handle (missing)



Fig. 9: Tableware from the 19th-century group

Back row: Chinese porcelain bowl, painted pearlware pedestal bowl, Worcester porcelain slop bowl with scratch blue-style decoration internally.

Foreground: imported porcelain teapot with red decoration (far left); Chinese porcelain famille rose saucer (far right) and teabowl with girl on tighrope (centre); Chinese Imari porcelain saucer (centre right); the remainder are painted pearlwares

certainly manufactured in a large provincial production centre such as Stourbridge or Newcastle, which dominated the lower and middle ends of the market in the 18th and early 19th centuries.²³ The forms and decoration date the glasses to between about 1800 and 1850.

The three jelly glasses, shaped like large egg cups and used for custards and puddings, are decorated with vertical or radial ribbing which extends down the stem and either ends at the foot or continues onto a moulded collar above the foot. One small tumbler and five Rummer wine glasses, with ovoid or cup-shaped bowls and short thick stems, are also decorated with ribbing and stylistically very similar to the jelly glasses. Six Rummors with slightly waisted stems and bladed knops below the bowl are very similar to examples from Canterbury dated 1830–40²⁴ and others in the MoL Reserve Collection such as A5343 from Oxford Street, dated 1701–1800. The plain wine glasses have conical bowls and solid drawn stems with a slight collar above the foot, very similar to examples from Portsmouth dated 1780–1810.²⁵ One wine glass has a square bucket-shaped

bowl. Four plain cylindrical tumblers are very similar to examples in the Reserve Collection such as A26742 from Hackney, dated 1766–1800.

A small group of tobacco pipe bowls from the same overall assemblage include examples from Mathew Charlton, known from trade directories to have been working in nearby Cowcross Street in the period 1799–1807.

Discussion

The excavations at West Smithfield can be characterised as providing evidence for peripheral and suburban development to the north-west of the main historical focus of settlement. The early Roman external activity recorded at the site is comparable with evidence from adjacent sites such as 8–22 Smithfield Street, where five rubbish pits were excavated,²⁶ and 2–12 Hosier Lane, where quarrying and debris dated from c. AD 50–160.²⁷ The main focus of settlement lay to the south towards Newgate and east towards Cripplegate.²⁸ The site apparently lay outside the main area of the later Roman cemetery.

There was no surviving evidence of post-Roman activity before 12th-

century quarrying. The first extant structures were small 13th- and 14th-century buildings on the northern part of the site, with hearth structures to the south perhaps representing open air cook-shops: it is interesting to note that the charred plant remains from the Oven at Queen Street also contained grains from fodder crops (in that case, vetch) and from the hearths, a range of animal, bird and fish bones comparable to those found at West Smithfield.²⁹ The wide variety of food species clearly illustrates the wealth of meats available to the local populace. The hearths were replaced by relatively high-status residential buildings, (given the evidence of the building foundation types and the materials used, for example the floor tiles) but these were superseded by unusual 16th-century circular structures that may have been related to the establishment of the George Inn on the West Smithfield street frontage, which is recorded from 1560.³⁰

The 17th- to 19th-century pitting and rubbish disposal can be interpreted as 'backyard' activity associated with the George Inn. The faunal material from the 19th-century cesspit fills is different from earlier deposits, with a



Fig. 10: Other notable items from the 19th-century group – a selection of transfer-printed pearlware bowls (back row), teabowls (left), saucers, a small bowl and a jug (centre) and a sauceboat (right)



Fig. 11: Drinking and jelly glasses from the 19th-century household clearance group

notable absence of game species and larger major domesticates reflecting breed improvements in the latter half of the 18th century.³¹ Affluent members of society tended towards choice

domesticate rather than game meats from the early post-medieval period.³² The glass and ceramic groups from the final use of the cesspit probably relate to the disuse of the George Inn (Fig. 12).

The inn is recorded at 16 West Smithfield in the *London Street Directory* for 1856 (proprietor W Johnson) but by 1871 the Albion Bank was located at this address.



Fig. 12: view of the George Inn, West Smithfield c. 1830 by RB Schnebbelie
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