Introduction

The 12th-century writer William Fitz Stephen described Smithfield as a ‘smooth field’, situated just outside the city gates, where on the ‘sixth day of the week, unless it be a major feast-day … there is a much frequented show of fine horses for sale … In another place apart stand the wares of the country-folk, instruments of agriculture, long-flanked swine, cows with swollen udders, and woolly flocks …’

Fitz Stephen aptly described the topography of the Smithfield area to the north-west of the Roman and medieval walled city. It was a combination of its extra-mural location and...

Roman, medieval and post-medieval activity at West Smithfield: recent work at 8–22 Smithfield Street and 30–38 Hosier Lane, City of London

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favourable topography which provided the impetus for the development of a major livestock market here.

The aim of this article is to describe the archaeological work carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service before and during the recent redevelopment of 8–22 Smithfield Street and 30–38 Hosier Lane (Fig. 1). The Museum of London Archaeological and Research Centre (LAARC) holds the site archive under the code SFH00. The natural geology of the site consisted of London Clay, sealed by truncated terrace gravels (top 13.01m OD) (Open Area 1). All the overlying brickearth had been removed by quarrying and post-medieval truncation.

**Roman activity**

Surviving Roman evidence (Open Area 2) consisted of five rubbish pits. Pottery from these pits dates to AD 50–160 (Fig. 2). There was no evidence of quarrying during this period. A few fragments of human bone were recovered from the backfills of two medieval pits, implying that there were Roman burials either on or near the site.

These burials presumably formed part of the extra-mural Roman cemetery situated to the west of the walled city. In 1749 excavations for a sewer at the east end of Hosier Lane revealed a lead coffin and in c. 1870 sewer-digging in Cock Lane revealed a cremation urn and a coffin burial. Nearby, at St Bartholomew’s Hospital, an early Roman cremation urn was found in 1865, and in 1877 building work there revealed two limestone coffins. The 1979 excavations at St Bartholomew’s Hospital uncovered at least 20 late Roman inhumation burials; an excavation at 1–4 Giltspur Street in 1989 revealed at least 127 late Roman inhumation burials. Recent excavations (east of the site) at 13–21 West Smithfield discovered a number of early Roman features including a well, some rubbish pits and external dumping, but no burials (Fig. 1). The 1998–2001 investigations at 2–12 Hosier Lane (south of the present site) also revealed residual human bone. Watching brief work during 2002 at 31–32 Cock Lane found one inhumation burial, presumed to be of Roman date.

**Saxon-Norman pits**

The earliest post-Roman activity recorded on site consisted of two unlined, rectangular, rubbish pits dating to 1180–1200 (Fig. 2, Open Area 3). Plant remains recovered from these pits included grains of barley, wheat and oats. Wild plant seeds included vetches, stinking mayweed and grasses. Food species present included seeds of blackberry/raspberry and elder. It is probable that these food species are only present as a component of human cess, as these are all small seeds that are eaten with the fruit. Seeds of white horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) were also present; it is a wasteland plant with medicinal qualities, it was traditionally used in East Anglia for making a tea to alleviate coughs and colds.

It is documented that West Smithfield was the site of a horse and cattle market by 1123. The survival of features from this period has doubtless been affected by later activity, particularly quarrying. At 2–12 Hosier Lane there was external dumping and a large drainage ditch aligned east-west was dug during the late 11th or
early 12th century. The ditch was subsequently used for the disposal of domestic rubbish and butchery waste. At 13–21 West Smithfield, sand and gravel quarrying had begun during the 12th century and two of the pits were quite rapidly backfilled between 1270/90 and 1350.

**Medieval quarrying and pitting: late 13th to early 14th century**

By the 14th century site activity (Open Area 4) was marked by an increasing density of features, implying that the whole site was now fully utilised, judging by the distribution of features (Fig. 3). The impression is that all these features were located within the back yards of buildings situated along the street frontage. The existence of ‘Hosyer Lane’ is first documented in 1338, while the existence of Smithfield Street, then known as ‘Cowlane’ was first documented in 1281. At 2–12 Hosier Lane the drainage ditch was infilled during the 13th century and the area subsequently reclaimed by soil dumping and the creation of new drainage ditches. At 13–21 West Smithfield the site was levelled by soil dumping during the 14th century, and buildings and hearths were then constructed.

A range of activities were carried out on the site, including gravel extraction with secondary use of the quarries for the disposal of cess and domestic rubbish. Other quarry pits were apparently systematically backfilled. The relatively small size of many gravel pits suggests casual small-scale extraction rather than large-scale commercial activity. Some regularly shaped features with vertical or steep-sloping sides are interpreted as pits solely intended for cess and rubbish disposal, implying that there was some domestic occupation here. Interestingly, the spatial distribution of these features show that the surviving pits are all some distance from the Cow Lane and Hosier Street frontage, implying that this portion of the site was entirely built-up.
Plant remains recovered from pits of this period included grains of barley, oats and wheat, plus various arable land weed seeds. These seeds imply the existence of gardens or fields nearby. Braun and Hogenberg’s map of London (published 1572) shows fields and orchards a short distance to the north and west of Smithfield. Food seeds recovered from cess samples included wild strawberry, blackberry/raspberry, elder and figs. Numerous seeds of white horehound were present in one sample. Animal bones from this period consisted of adult ox and pig bones.

**Medieval quarrying and pitting: late 14th and 15th century**

The later medieval period (Open Area 5) was characterised by extensive quarrying, and both the density and size of pits noticeably increased (Fig. 4). Associated ceramics show that many of the features were backfilled between 1350 and 1400. The function of some of these features is hard to determine, but it is assumed that the smaller ones with a regular shape (normally oval or sub-rectangular) and sides with a uniform profile were excavated for the purpose of cess/rubbish disposal. The larger pits with very irregular shapes, profiles and bases were probably intended as sand/gravel quarries, though most were later used for cess/rubbish disposal. In some instances the quarry pits cut through earlier backfilled features, meaning they were quarrying soil rather than gravel.

Food waste from the quarry pits included cod vertebrae, eggsHELLs, oyster and cockleshells. The animal bones consisted mainly of oxen, but sheep/goats, pigs, chickens and geese were also present. Horses were represented by one adult tooth. As this tooth could have excreted and then disposed of along with the manure, its presence need not imply the consumption of horse flesh. Evidence of butchery practice included carcase splitting, disarticulation and sub-division into joints. This practice was particularly noticeable on the ox vertebrae, metacarpals and femurs which all had been split down the midline, indicating division of the carcase into sides and marrow removal. One ox metatarsal, transversely sawn through at the midshaft, indicated the collection of bones for manufacture.

The presence of juvenile and sub-adult pig bones suggests that pigs were being kept locally. The records of the London Assize of Nuisance during the 14th century state that people were keeping ‘oxen, cows and pigs’ within urban tenements, much to the annoyance of their neighbours, and there were a number of complaints concerning pigsties.

Plant remains from this period consist of charred grains of barley and wheat. Food seeds recovered from cess samples included blackberry/raspberry, apple, fig and elder. There were also arable land weed seeds such as fumitory, chickweed and fat hen and wasteland plants including stinging nettles and henbane. The cess samples also contained fly puparia and cereal bran. Wetland plants including rushes, sedges and water plantain were present in considerable numbers, and it is probable that this material was old floor or roof covering which was being reused to seal the smelly cesspits. This raises the question of medievall cleanliness. There are two opposite view points on this topic. Augustus Jessopp wrote ‘the sediment of the town population in the middle ages was a dense slough of stagnant misery, squalor, famine, loathsome disease and dull despair…’. William Morris described medieval London as ‘small, white and clean, The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.’ What is clear from this site and numerous other excavations is that considerable emphasis was placed on constructing cesspits, and issues pertaining to their maintenance and location were matters that the London Assize of Nuisance from
1301 onward regularly adjudicated on.\textsuperscript{27} The court records show that while there was clearly a problem with sanitation, attempts were being made to improve the situation, and the behaviour of anti-social or unsanitary neighbours was considered unacceptable.

One feature recorded at the site is interpreted as a soakaway, presumably taking water from yards or drains. Another feature was a cess/rubbish pit with traces of a timber lining and postholes, this implying that it was intended to be emptied and reused. Some rubbish pits without datable finds, have been assigned to this period solely on stratigraphic grounds (Open Area 6). One undated medieval feature of note is probably a well, whose stone lining had apparently been robbed out.

As population density in the City of London increased, reusable stone-lined cesspits became common from the 14th century onward and often remained in use for centuries. The material recovered from these pits generally only relates to their final use. The practice of disposing of cess and rubbish in reusable stone-lined pits means that there is a comparative scarcity of well-dated 15th-century ceramic groups from excavations within the City of London, except along the waterfront, where much of the city’s domestic rubbish was being dumped.\textsuperscript{28}

Only one medieval stone-lined cesspit was found on site, and its depth implies that it was situated within a cellar of a substantial building (Fig. 5). The trapezoidal-shaped cesspit was constructed of mortared chalk, ragstone and flint rubble blocks. It possessed an external buttress along its north wall and a floor of crushed chalk, and was built during the late 13th or early 14th century. Cellared buildings with masonry foundations were constructed next door at West Smithfield during the 15th century.\textsuperscript{29}

### The medieval ceramics (Nigel Jeffries)

Some 36\% of the medieval pottery (by sherd count) from the site was recovered from the backfill of the quarry pits. A further 21\% of the pottery assemblage was derived from makeup or levelling dumps, intended to counteract the effects of quarrying. Table 1 summarises the different types of medieval pottery found locally by numbers of sherds and estimated vessels.

There are a dozen closely datable 14th-century groups of reasonable size from West Smithfield

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medieval pottery by type</th>
<th>Hosier Lane</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>West Smithfield</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Smithfield Street</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early medieval hand-built coarsewares (970–1150)</td>
<td>SC 196</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>SC 18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>SC 16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV 153</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>ENV 15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ENV 11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early medieval wheel-thrown non-local wares (970–1150)</td>
<td>SC 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>SC 1</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>SC 0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>ENV 1</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>ENV 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continental imports (1050–1200)</td>
<td>SC 12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>SC 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>SC 6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>ENV 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>ENV 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local wheel-thrown glazed wares (1080–1350)</td>
<td>SC 197</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>SC 345</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>SC 165</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV 158</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>ENV 190</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>ENV 116</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Late Saxon wares</td>
<td>SC 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>SC 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>SC 0</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENV 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>ENV 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>ENV 0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-local wheel-thrown glazed wares (1270–1350)</td>
<td>SC 15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>SC 158</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>SC 66</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV 7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>ENV 55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>ENV 22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Surrey whitewares (1290–1500)</td>
<td>SC 84</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>SC 311</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>SC 365</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENV 55</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>ENV 207</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>ENV 170</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheel-thrown coarsewares (1140–1350)</td>
<td>SC 87</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>SC 47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>SC 121</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENV 78</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>ENV 31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>ENV 60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (sherd count/ENV)</td>
<td>593/458</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>881/500</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>739/384</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: medieval pottery supply to West Smithfield by type (SC = sherd count, ENV = estimated number of vessels).
and the site. However, there is a scarcity of high-quality pottery, although there is one Hertfordshire glazed ware jug with a stamped boss decoration. The bunghole jars found on site and at West Smithfield are likely to have been used for storing beer. Such vessels may have been derived from the inns around the livestock market.

As is usual for the medieval period, cooking pots and serving jugs dominate in the three assemblages under discussion (Table 1), although different, specialised cooking vessels, such as bowls, cauldrons, dishes, dripping dishes and pipkins are present in small numbers. The 14th-century ceramics included a fragment of a coarse border ware perforated ceramic disc, interpreted as an internal fitting from a brazier (Fig. 6). An identical disc was found at the Baltic Exchange site along with other industrial ceramics of 15th-century date, connected with distillation and non-ferrous metalworking.

Continental imports occur in only very small quantities on all three Smithfield sites, perhaps reflecting the character of the area as a major livestock market rather than part of the city’s mercantile quarter. ‘Local’ products of London-type ware and the Surrey whiteware industry were widely available and relatively cheap, and these two types of pottery are well represented in all three assemblages. Presumably the local inns and cook-shops would have used cheap pottery in expectation of a high loss and breakage rate. The most unusual imported ware found on this site was a sherd of a mature Valencian lustreware dish (Fig. 7). This vessel has the start of the gothic letter I representing the beginning of the IHS monogram, an unusual decoration that dates to after the 1420s, when Saint Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444) adopted this monogram as his badge.

**Earlier post-medieval features: 16th- and 17th-century pitting**

The Agas map of c. 1560 shows the entire street frontage along Hosier Lane and Smithfield Street was lined with buildings, presumably with backyards where cess and rubbish pits could still be dug. Pressure on external space meant that gravel extraction had probably ceased by this date. John Stow writing in c. 1600 observed that the area of the livestock market had been much reduced by ‘encroachments and enclosures’, and he also noted that the ‘west side of Smithfield hath divers fair inns, and comely buildings’. Features from this period consist of two rubbish pits, two cess/rubbish pits and one cesspit; according the pattern of property boundaries mapped in 1676 nearly all these features were situated within external areas (Fig. 8, Open Area 7). During this period the stone-lined cesspit was altered by the addition of an internal brick wall (Fig. 5). This wall has two possible interpretations. First, it could have been added when the property was subdivided. Second, it could have served as a weir to subdivide the liquid and solid fractions, make emptying easier.

A similar internal brick partition was found in the medieval stone-lined garderobe within the eastern range of the inner courtyard of the Bishop of Winchester’s palace in Southwark. Pottery from the final usage of the cesspit dates to the early 17th century.

**Later post-medieval features: 17th to early 18th century**

Evidence of this period is very fragmentary due the depth of recent basements. Remains consisted of a well, a fragment of brick floored cellar and a drain along the Hosier Lane frontage (Fig. 9). The well, which was probably located within a cellar, was circular in shape and constructed of 17th-century bricks. The lower portion of the well was barrel-lined. Latterly, the well was used for the...
disposal of cess and domestic rubbish. Finds from its backfill included pottery dating to 1701–11 and clay tobacco pipes dating to 1730–60.

**Late 18th to 20th century features and deposits**

There was evidence of several brick-built cellars along the Hosier Lane frontage. A rectangular brick-lined cesspit and a number of drains were constructed below cellar floor level (Fig. 9). The backfill of this cesspit contained a clay pipe bowl of William Ditchburn of Stepney (1832–45). Many cesspits in London went out of use during 1860–80, when main sewers were constructed as part of the capital’s much needed public health improvements.38

Between 1873 and 1914, as a result of several developments, many of the 17th-century properties were amalgamated. The new buildings possessed deep single-storey basements. All the buildings were destroyed by enemy action during the Blitz and subsequently the basements were backfilled with rubble and the area levelled. From 1953–2002 the site was used by the Smithfield Meat Market traders as a vehicle park.

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compiled by Nigel Jeffries; photography by Maggie Cox; the publication figures were produced by Sophie Lamb and Neville Constantine; the project management was undertaken by Robin Nielsen; Nathalie Cohen provided information on the West Smithfield excavation; and Peter Rowsome and Sue Hurst for editing.


11. N. Moore, The history of St Bartholomew’s Hospital vol 1 (1918) 14–27.

12. Telfer op cit fn 8, 117.


15. Telfer op cit fn 8, 119.


18. Roberts op cit fn 10.


22. H.M. Chew and W. Kellaway (eds) London Assize of Nuisance 1301–1431 (1973) London Record Society. In 1365 the court heard that Gilbert Lyrps of St Alpege’s parish Cripplegate kept ‘various animals’ in his tenement, which were constantly breaking down the walls of his neighbour’s house, see entry 524.

23. Roberts op cit fn 18.

24. Roberts op cit fn 18. Wetland plants seeds included those of the water-plantain family (Alismataceae indet.), rushes (Juncus sp.), bristle club-rush (Isolepis setacea), sedge, oval sedge type (Carex ovalis), hairy sedge type (Carex hirta) and pale sedge type (Carex pallescens).

25. A. Jessopp The coming of the friars; and other historic essays (1889) 6.


27. Chew and Kellaway op cit fn 22.


34. Prockter and Taylor op cit fn 17.


