

be removed with the horns, tail and foot bones still attached, and delivered to the tanner by the butcher or fellmonger in that condition¹³. A tanner who started work in the 1920s in his family business wrote "The writer remembers when there were horns on the hide when bought and also foot bones but this must have been 50 or 60 years ago at least"¹⁴. In a watercolour sketch (Fig. 6) made between about 1860 and 1873 of a skin cart from Kingston¹⁵ the feet can clearly be seen on the skins. Leather dressers have traditionally been divided into tanners, who treated the hides of mature cattle and horses, and tawyers who treated the skins of sheep, goats, calves and other smaller animals. In the Middle Ages vellum was made from calf skin, but only skins of calves younger than six weeks were considered suitable¹⁶. By the 18th century vellum was little used, so the bones are not likely to derive from vellum manufacture. It is very likely however that they are from calf skins, collected over a period from butchers in Kingston and further afield. They would be assembled until a quantity was ready to be sold or treated. At that stage the bones attached to the skins were disposed of¹⁴.

A tanner or a fellmonger is the most likely origin of this assemblage. The sheep foot bones from Walmgate were found in a shallow pit near tanning pits; however as the Brick Lane properties did not have access to a good water supply, it is unlikely that there was a tannery on the site. Historically, in Kingston the tannery was near the River Thames. Perhaps we should invoke an intermediary, a fellmonger, who bought calf skins from butchers and dairymen, and removed the feet before passing the skins on to the tanner.

13. R. Thompson 'Leather manufacture in the post-medieval period with special reference to Northamptonshire' *Post-Medieval Archaeol* 15 (1981) 161-75.

14. J. Baker *pers. comm.*

15. W. F. Freelove *Victorian Horses and Carriages* (ed. D. L. Jens Smith) (1979).

16. G. Peignot *Essai sur l'histoire du parchemin et du vélin* (1812) 27; A. & D. Diderot *Encyclopédie* (1754).

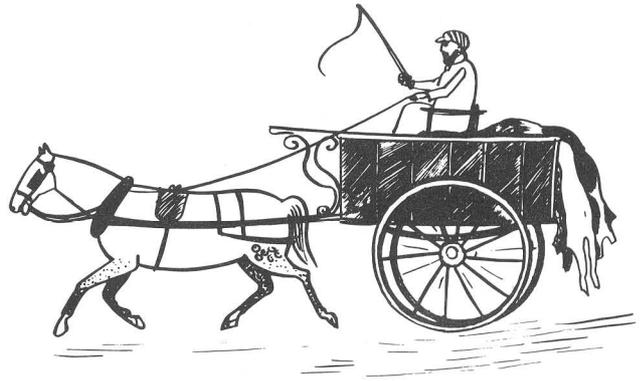


Fig. 6: skin cart, Kingston upon Thames, redrawn from a watercolour sketch by William Freelove between about 1865 and 1873. The feet can be seen on the skins hanging over the back of the cart.

Conclusion

The western area of the Knapp Drewett site where feature 41 was situated appeared to have little archaeological potential, as it was well back from the street frontage and had been subjected to a considerable amount of post-medieval destruction. For this reason the post-medieval pits in the area were sampled only. The animal bones from the pit proved to be of greater importance than was at first realised as they were able to illustrate aspects of economic life in 18th century Kingston. It is a reminder that excavators need to be alert to the significance of groups of bones of a single type, for on urban excavations it is assemblages like these which may be the most informative.

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Letters

ANNE MOWBRAY

WE WERE VERY interested to read Professor Roger Warwick's description of the skeleton of Anne Mowbray (Vol. 5, 176-9) but we would like to take issue with him over one small matter. When noting that both first metacarpals had distal epiphyses, Warwick (in the caption to Fig. 4) states that this is rare abnormality. A survey of radiographs of the hands of 200 children aged between 4 and 8 years carried out by Weddell in 1939¹, however, showed that 80% had distal epiphyses on their first metacarpal.

When examining bones from archaeological sites we have also found a considerable proportion of juvenile first metacarpals with

distal epiphyses from sites ranging in time from the neolithic to the 18th century. It is not possible to give an accurate prevalence since the small bones of the hand often do not survive, but this condition is certainly not rare and has probably not changed its frequency much over time.

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1. G. Weddell, 'The frequency of double epiphyses in the metacarpals and metatarsals of Man', *J Anatomy* 73 (1939) 360.