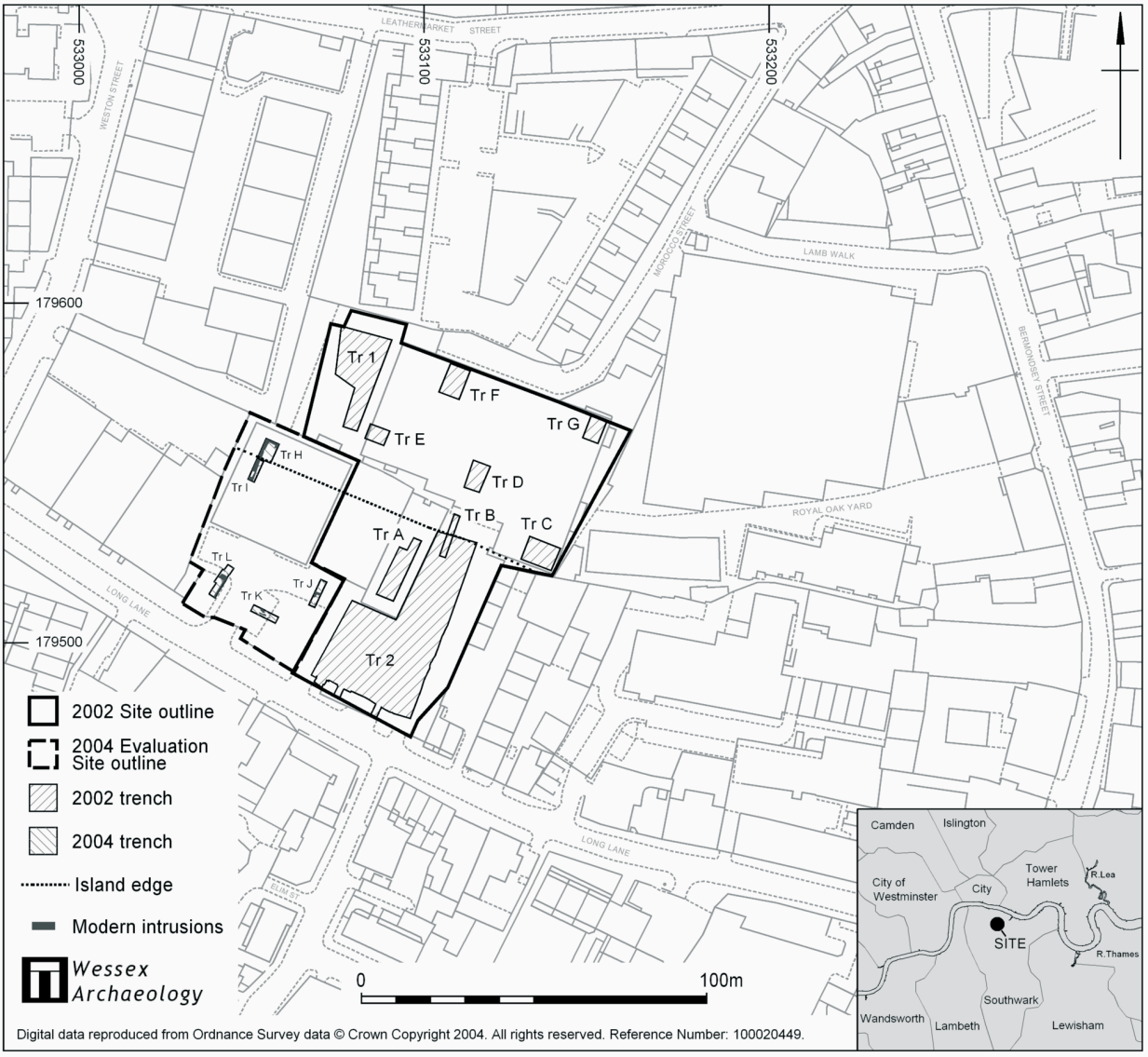

Fig. 1: site location

Excavations at 211 Long Lane, Southwark Part II; Romano-British pasture to post-medieval tanneries

Jacqueline I. McKinley

Introduction

Between July and September 2002, Wessex Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological investigations in advance of development at 211 Long Lane, Southwark (TQ 3315 7960; site code LGM02; Fig. 1). The site lies *c*. 800m south of the current course of the Thames, between 2.33m OD (north) and 3.23m OD (south) at pavement level.

The results of a desk-based assessment[1] and archaeological evaluation[2] indicated that the site would divide into two topographic zones; an 'on-

island' (gravel) area to the south and an 'off-island' (peat and alluvial deposits) area to the north. The excavation (trenches 1–2) and test trenches (trenches A–G) were located to enable adequate investigation of both areas (Fig. 1).

The site lay on the archaeologically unexplored north-west margin of the Bermondsey eyot between more densely investigated areas to the east and west, including the Romano-British and medieval settlement *foci* around Borough High Street and Bermondsey Street.[3] The Long Lane investigations aimed to clarify the form and nature of the prehistoric topography,[4] to ascertain the date and character of Romano-British and medieval activity in the context of the wider area, and to characterise the date and nature of post-medieval activity specifically with reference to land reclamation and the tanning industry. Monoliths taken from trenches 1 and G provided geotopographic and palaeoenvironmental evidence and samples for dating (Fig. 1).

In October 2004, an evaluation was undertaken immediately to the west of the site at 193–197 Long Lane (Fig. 1, trenches H–L) which showed similar sequences to those observed in the main investigations.[5]

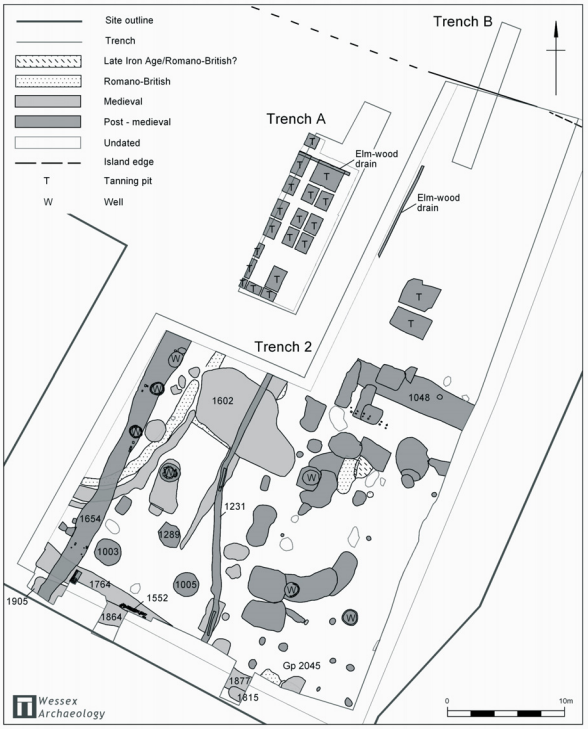

Fig. 2: on-island (southern) trenches; all periods

Geo-topography

Excavations nearby have established that the palaeo-topography of the Bermondsey and Southwark areas consists of low-lying gravel eyots separated by mudflats, marshes and tidal watercourses.[6] The site lay over the north-western margins of the Bermondsey gravel eyot, south of the course of the former Neckinger river.[7]

The prehistoric topography and environment of the site is presented in Part I (previous issue), but may be summarised as follows. The edge of the sand and gravel island was marked by an acute break in slope at the north end of Trench 2 (Fig. 2). The gravel surface falls from *c*. 1.11m OD at the Long Lane frontage to -0.33m OD on the island margins, 91% of the fall occurring in the final 16m.[8] This landscape clearly affected the nature and intensity of human activity in the area.

The stratigraphic sequence across the northern half of the site comprised Early Bronze Age to early Romano-British peat deposits overlying alluvial clays or occasionally sands. In the north-west trenches the peat was sealed by layers of alluvial clay and sand containing few Bronze Age and relatively common unabraded Romano-British ceramics. In common with other nearby sites[9] a late medieval/early post-medieval worked soil horizon (mixed alluvial silty clays; *c*. 0.10–0.90m depth, decreasing north to south) lay between the gravel and post-medieval make-up layers in the south of the site, and the alluvial sand (or peat where the sand was absent) in the north of the site.

Romano-British

In the early Romano-British period the area of investigation lay on the south bank of the Neckinger river.[10] Throughout the period the river became progressively choked with sediment and occupation debris as the off-island area was subject to frequent flooding (fresh and brackish water), resulting in extensive deposits of silts and clays over the later prehistoric grass-sedge marsh.[11] There are indications that remnants of alder fen survived, but generally more open grassland-sedge conditions prevailed. On the

drier soils – in common with observations elsewhere in the vicinity [12] – the remaining trees and woodland consisted largely of oak and hazel.

The discovery of Romano-British burials at the west end of Long Lane, and its location along a spine of high ground between two settlement foci has lead to the suggestion that the route may have had a Roman origin.[13] These investigations produced no evidence to support this hypothesis. The site appears to lie in what would have comprised a marginal area of low-key agricultural activity – seasonal grazing and a few cultivated fields (Figs. 2 and 3; sparse arable weeds and crops including spelt, hulled and free-threshing wheat) – most likely related to the settlement in Bermondsey[13] rather than the major site at Southwark *c*. 0.5–1 km to the north-west.[14] There was some domestic refuse disposal, presumably as surface middens, since although *c*. 14% by weight of the pottery assemblage is Romano-British (spanning the entire period with an emphasis on 1st–2nd centuries AD) most of it was redeposited in later features and alluvial deposits, as was much of the ceramic building material. The finds are similar to those observed elsewhere in the immediate vicinity[15] and there is a strong possibility of subsequent removal of evidence as suggested by Heard[16] for other sites on the Bermondsey eyot.

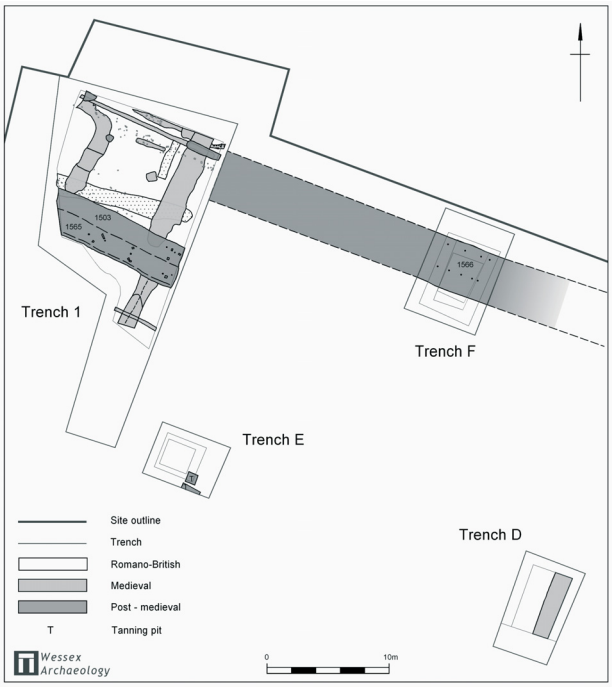

Fig. 3: off-island (northern) trenches; all periods

Medieval

The route now followed by Long Lane was established by the late 12th/early 13th century,[17] providing a causeway across the marshes connecting Bermondsey Abbey with the settlement at Borough High Street[18] (Fig. 4). What little evidence survived for this period from the site largely coincides with the date of the road's establishment, most of the pottery (8% by weight of the total assemblage; few imports with London-types predominating) relating to the late 12th to early 14th centuries. A sequence of causewayed ditches (*c*. 1.20m wide, shallow concave sides and bases) running adjacent to the Long Lane frontage are likely to have a late medieval origin, continuing into the early post-medieval phase, and may have formed roadside ditches (Fig. 2: 1764, 1905, 1864, 1877 and 1815). Gravel extraction – suggested by a series of shallow intercutting pits (Fig. 2: 1602) – may also date from this period, the gravel possibly being for road make-up.

Periodic flooding and alluviation (max. 0.49m depth of clays and sands) throughout the early medieval period raised the ground level in the northern half of the site. Later medieval drainage ditches (Fig. 3: Trenches 1 and D) – some with wattle-style revetting – held semi-permanent, slow-moving fresh water and drained to the north, possibly into the Neckinger, now reduced to a stream. Despite its close proximity to the Abbey precincts *c*. 150 m to the east (Fig. 4), the site appears to have retained its earlier land-use characteristics as marginal, low-key agricultural land, possibly farmed by the Abbey's occupants.[19] The northern half of the site comprised scrub and open ground, perhaps used as seasonal pasture; the southern half was possibly used for cultivation (barley, free-threshing wheat, rye, peas and beans) and refuse disposal. There are indications that small-scale cultivation and retting of flax may have been undertaken in the area (seeds and capsules from trench 1).[20] There is also evidence (mineralised figs and almonds from pit 1688, Trench 1) for imported foodstuffs associated with relatively

prosperous households,[21] possibly derived from the Abbey.

Post-medieval

The area appears to have retained its medieval topographic and land-use characteristics into the early part of this period. Faithorne and Newcourt's 1658 map shows the area of the site lying at the edge of a large open space with the Neckinger stream *c*. 55m to the north (Fig. 4). By 1746 (Fig. 5) most of the undeveloped northern frontage of Long Lane was occupied by tanner's yards, only the northern half of the site remaining as open ground with a small area of cultivation.

Dating and environmental evidence from the site concurs with the map regression; there was limited recovery – and that residual – of 16th-century ceramics, the majority of the post-medieval assemblage dating from the late 17th to 18th centuries (also the peak period for clay pipe discard). Plant remains indicate that the northern part of the site remained relatively damp and open, with evidence for cultivated soils and hedgerows. Snails from the large, revetted or possibly bridged (re-using worked timber piles probably of 18th-century date) east-west ditch in Trench 1 (Fig. 3: 1503, recut of 1565) indicate that it was set in marshy ground with some tall vegetation and dry ground cover. The ditch held clean slow-running water, clearly related to the pre-industrial use of this area and close in position to the drainage ditch – one of numerous such ditches possibly also used for irrigation – denoted on Rocque's map (Fig. 5).

The roadside ditch was apparently backfilled in the 16th century; though similar ditches on the south side of the road in Rocque's map (Fig. 5) may bring into question its proposed medieval date. The land was probably used as rough grazing in the 16th and early 17th centuries, the earliest datable features falling in the late 17th to 18th centuries. It should be noted, however, that few of the structures shown in the 1746 map could be traced in the surviving archaeology (Figs. 2 and 5), and subsequent activity may have erased evidence of other structures from the archaeological record. A revetted ditch (Fig. 2: 1654) running perpendicular to the road was backfilled in the later 17th or 18th century; the fill included large quantities of ceramics in a range of

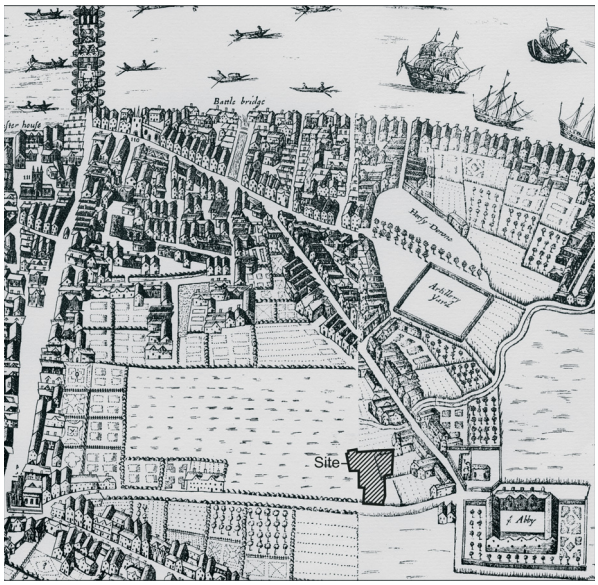

Fig. 4: extract from Faithorne and Newcourt 1658 showing position of site

cooking, serving, storage and other vessel forms and included German stoneware, North Italian slipware, Metropolitan slipwares, tin-glazed earthenwares as well as the more utilitarian redwares and Border wares (Fig. 7). The orientation of the ditch is similar to many of those shown on Rocque's map forming land divisions while also functioning as drainage/irrigation channels (Fig. 5), suggesting that at least some of

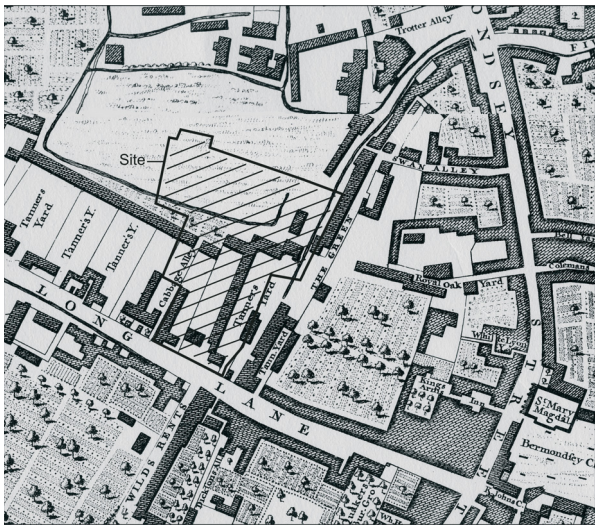

Fig. 5: extract from John Rocque's 1746 *Plan of London, Westminster and Southwark,* reproduced by kind permission of Phillimore & Co. Ltd., Chichester.

the land divisions indicated predated the use of the area for tanning.

The tanning industry dominated the site from the later 17th century, the area apparently being one of the main areas of expansion of the Bermondsey tanning industry, together with the Grange *c*. 300m to the south-west. There is limited evidence for horn-working and tawing as well as tanning, though the latter dominated. Some of the earliest remnants of the industry comprised horn core (Fig. 2: 1003 and 1005) and barrel-lined pits (Fig. 2: 1289) situated close to the street frontage (Fig. 6). Remnants of a ragstone and gravel surface (Fig. 2: 1552; ?17th century) overlay the roadside ditches and may have been related to a post-hole structure (Fig. 2: Gp. 2045) situated to the east and aligned with the street frontage. The latter may represent one of the structures shown in Rocque's map. The nature of the late 17th- to early-19th-century groups of relatively shallow (0.50–0.80m) intercutting pits to the south of ditch 1048 in Trench 2 is unclear. Some were undoubtedly rubbish pits while others, although containing debris, do not appear to have primarily served that function and some contain so little material that inclusions appeared incidental. There was no evidence to suggest that the pits were directly associated with the tanning process but it is possible that at least some – given similarities in form and density to early post-medieval tanneries elsewhere[22] – may originally have been lined with horn cores, wood or some other material which was subsequently removed and the pits either backfilled or used for refuse disposal.

Fig. 6: tanning pit 1005 with horn core lining

A sample of a 100 horn cores from pits 1003 and 1005 was subject to detailed examination. There is no homogeneity in the shape or size of horn cores, which derived from improved and unimproved breeds of longhorn cattle, perhaps reflecting collection and redistribution practices as followed from 1626 in central London by the London Horners' Company.[23] Slaughter was generally by pole-axing, the horn cores being removed – sometimes roughly – after skinning by various types of cleaver blows. The majority of the cattle were young adults, the slightly younger age of the oxen (49%) compared with cows (38%) and bulls (17%) suggesting they were more commonly used for meat. A similar 18th-century deposit from Bermondsey Street included animals of a variety of ages and horn sizes, the ratio between the numbers of bulls (66%), oxen (23%) and cows (11%)[24] indicating a variation in animal husbandry to that implied from the Long Lane assemblage. The inter- and intra-site differences may reflect selection for size – especially when horn cores were being reused as building material[25] – meaning that no confident conclusions about animal husbandry or breeding practice can be drawn from this material.

The major phase of ground make-up in the north of the site occurred in the 17th to 19th centuries. The 18th and 19th centuries saw a shift northwards in the location of tanning pits, with the construction of dense blocks of timber tanks (mostly softwood planks nailed together) over most of the northern part of the site (excluding Trench C; Figs. 2 and 3), the ground level often being built-up around them. Associated features included timber-lined drains and soakaways (1231 and Trench D – not illustrated) and bored elm-wood drains in Trenches 2 and A (Fig. 1). The large, east-west ditch (1566) in Trench F (steep concave sides and shallow concave base; continued into Trench 1) was one of three parallel ditches crossing the northern half of the site, presumably providing surface drainage and water for the tanning process. These ditches were partly cut through the make-up layers, and had driven round-wood stake revetments. Waterlogged plant remains from the tanks in trench A indicated that alder and birch bark had been used in the tanning process. Similar features and deposits have been

Fig. 7: range of 17th- and early-18th-century pottery, glass and clay pipes from ditch 1654

Fig. 8: range of 19th-century tea-wares and table-wares from pit 1003

observed in many archaeological investigations in the Bermondsey area,[26] though no later brick-lined tanning pits as seen at some sites were present at Long Lane.

The southern *c.* 30m of the site was presumably used for more front-of-house operations associated with the yards, and possibly for domestic occupation. The old circular tanning pits were backfilled with domestic debris in the 19th century, incorporating 18th-century bricks and large quantities of ceramics including an interesting range of tea-drinking forms in creamware, pearlware, Chinese porcelain and black basalt ware (Fig. 8). Several other small rubbish pits and seven brick or chalk-lined wells were distributed across the southern portion of the site (Fig. 2), though the suitability of the latter for domestic use so close to such industrial activity is debatable.

Although animals that would have been commonly used for their skins were present in fairly large numbers – including cattle, sheep/goat, and to a lesser extent, horse – the variety of species represented indicates domestic rather than industrial refuse. Cattle and sheep/goat were butchered, as were the small number of pigs and some fish and bird (domestic fowl and goose). Dogs, cats, hares and rabbits may have been used for their skins or fur, though rabbit and hare is also likely to have been eaten. The species and their relative proportions suggest that consumption was of relatively low-status foodstuffs. Chopping was the most common form of butchery – quick, rather than careful divisions of the carcasses into portions of meat – and splitting of bone for marrow was not common. Industrial activity was suggested by clusters of head and foot bones in some pits, but most deposits also included some domestic debris. As was indicated by the horn-core analysis, provisioning methods suggest animals from various locations were brought into London and widely dispersed, first to butchers then to hide workers and horners.

The few charred plant remains recovered from the southern half of the site were similar to those of the medieval period, though there is some indication that they were being brought in from heavier clay soils rather than being grown locally. Peas and broad beans, apple and hazelnut are also present; some of them may have derived from the immediate vicinity in the 18th to early 19th centuries.

The pottery assemblage is dominated by coarse earthenwares, mostly of local manufacture supplemented by Surrey/Hampshire border products and a few regional wares from Dorset and the Midlands, with few stonewares. Factory-produced creamwares, pearlwares and English porcelain superseded the common British tin-glazed earthenwares at the end of the 18th century. They were augmented in the 19th century by bone china, lustreware, yellow wares with majolica and later stonewares dominate the later groups alongside the continuing redwares. The glass assemblage mostly comprised bottles but included phials and rare glass vessels. Personal items were very rare (pins, buckles, cased mirror) with a few leather shoe fragments.

All the finds and features from the evaluation trenches at 193–197 Long Lane (Fig. 1) were of post-medieval date, with no earlier residual material.[27] There was a similarly dated worked soil with small amounts of 17th- to 18th-century artefactual material, but no evidence of tanning pits despite the area being shown as occupied by a tanner's yard in Rocque's map (Fig. 5). There was deep, extensive 19th- to 20th-century truncation to the area, which has probably destroyed much of the earlier archaeological evidence.

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This report incorporates contributions by Michael J. Allen (snails and sediments), N.G. Cameron

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