

'A late medieval tannery at Tickhill' by Andrea Burgess and Phil Andrews

Details of excavations carried out in 2008 ahead of the development of Stoneybridge House and Sunnyside in an area bordered by Paper Mill Dyke, Bowers Walk, Lindrick and private housing have been published in the Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, Vol 89, No. 1, 2017, pages 99-113. It is possible to purchase a copy of the article via the Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society's website (at the costly rate of £28 for 15 pages!). Some information about the tannery is given in *Tickhill - discover its past* pages 66-67 but the article provides additional information.

For example, the quantity of cattle horn cores on the site indicates that 'heavy' tanning took place here, producing leather used for shoes, saddles, belts and other hard-wearing items. (Cattle horns made up two thirds of the skeletal elements uncovered. When butchers sold hides to tanners the skulls were usually attached to the skins. The horns helped the tanners to assess the age of the animals, the quality of the leather and therefore the price tanners were prepared to pay.) Tawyers or whittawyers processed 'light' leather made predominantly from sheep and goat skin for use as gloves and parchment. The separation of the two industries was formalised by the 14th Century.

Apart from tanning-related finds, the excavation revealed pottery sherds which represented 194 vessels. The most common type of pottery was Hallgate ware made in Doncaster (see a publication, right, about this pottery), followed by Don Valley pottery otherwise known as Coal Measures ware. There is a possibility that some of this latter pottery was made near Tickhill but a site for a pottery close by has not yet been found. A smaller quantity of pottery came from Nottinghamshire (early green glazed ware) and Lincolnshire. This contrasts with excavations of Roman sites where it was not unusual for pottery remains to be found which had been imported from the near Continent and even the Middle East.

The location of the medieval tannery on the south western edge of Tickhill was not only the desire to be near a source of running water. The stench coming from the processing of the hides would have been unacceptable too close to most people's homes. The article describes in some detail the many processes involved in turning hides into leather, one of the later stages being to stack layers of leather in a pit between ground oak bark for up to one year. The article notes that this last pit in the process was not identified at Tickhill, the complete site of the tannery having been 'truncated'.

