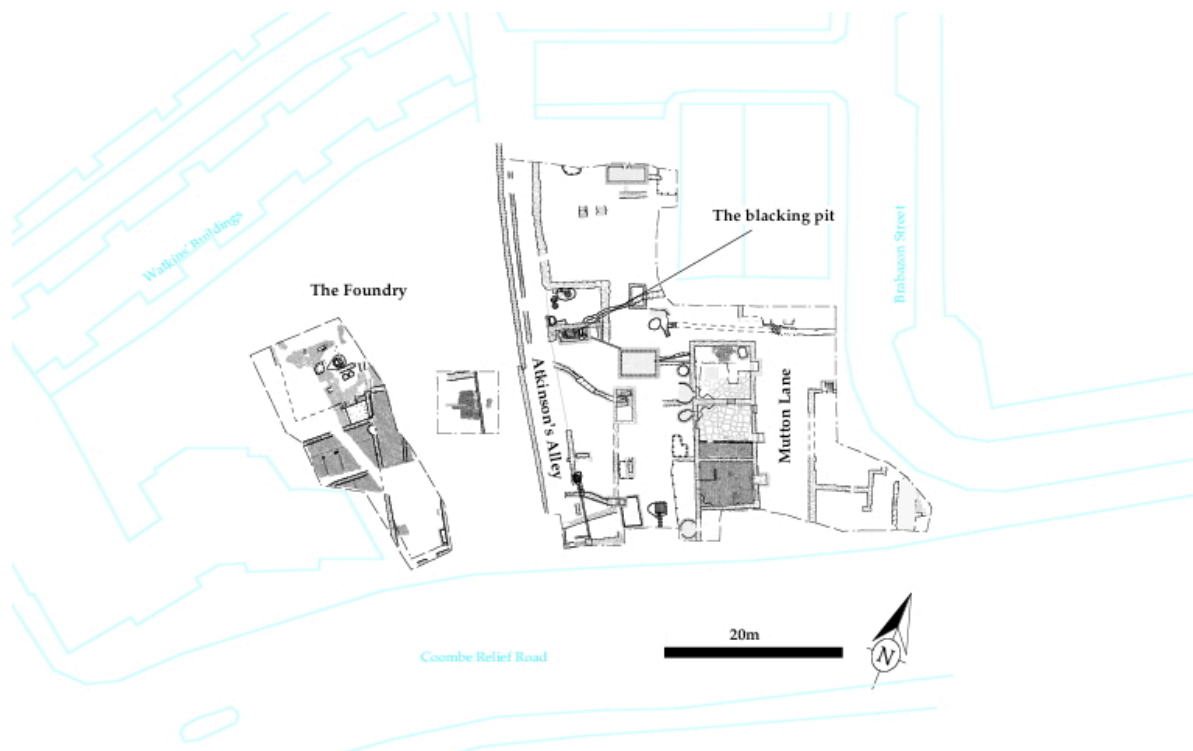


Excavation at the *Timberyard*, Coombe Relief Road, Dublin 8.

Antoine Giacometti

Introduction

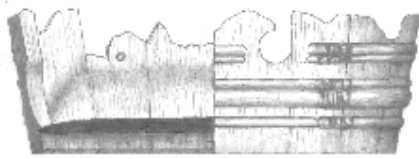
An archaeological excavation (06E710) was undertaken by the writer at the *Timberyard* from 22nd November 2006 to 19th January 2007, in advance of a development of social and affordable housing by Dublin City Council. The aims of the excavation were to document all on-site material of archaeological interest; particularly material that could relate to and expand our knowledge of medieval and post-medieval life in the Liberties. The *Timberyard* site was of particular interest as its footprint extended over a roadway (Ardee Row, originally Mutton Lane) and a laneway (McClea's Lane, originally Atkinson's Alley) that were both built over in the second half of the twentieth century. This provided a rare opportunity to examine the archaeology and the development of the lesser access routes through the Liberties.



The *Timberyard* in the medieval and early post-medieval periods (c. 1350-1650)

In the late medieval period the *Timberyard* lay within the Liberty of Donore, which comprised land outside of the city of Dublin, predominantly laid out in fields, belonging to the Abbey of St. Thomas the Martyr. Some ephemeral features and deposits in the lowest-lying part of the site (to the north along Atkinson's Alley), and isolated fragments of medieval pottery found in later features over the entire site, testify to the presence of late medieval agricultural activity across the area of excavation.

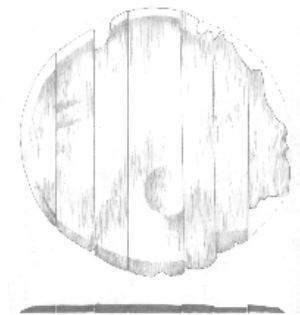
Following the dissolution of the great monastic estates in the mid-sixteenth century, the lands comprising the liberties of Thomas Court and Donore were granted to William Brabazon, vice-treasurer to Henry VIII. This transferal of vast tracts of monastic lands into private ownership notionally marks the end of the medieval period in Ireland, and ultimately opened up large areas of Dublin to private speculative development in the seventeenth century.



Barrel, timber 14 (C190)



The *Timberyard* site remained in fields during the sixteenth and early part of the seventeenth century, although the lines of future lanes and roads began to be established. A ditch running along the route of the future Atkinson's Alley may have marked a field boundary or an early unsurfaced track between fields. In light of the early seventeenth century development of the area, it might be suggested that this ditch represents a the sub-division of and parcelling out of Brabazon land for leasing to private developers, a process that may be represented on de Gomme's 1673 map. The beginnings of activity other than agricultural on the site were demonstrated by a series of seventeenth century rectangular pits along the future alleyway.

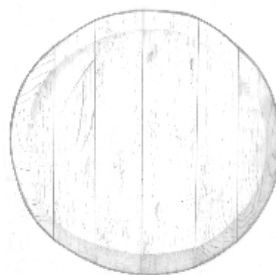


Base of barrel, timber 25 (C325)

The Confederate Wars of the 1640s were not represented in the archaeological record, despite the fact that evidence for contemporary defenses erected around the city has been identified on sites at Ardee Street and possibly at John Street South. These wars had an enormous impact on Ireland, as large numbers of people were killed, often cruelly by all sides, and lands were confiscated. The City of Dublin was on the side of the English Parliament, which demonstrates the increasing anglicisation of the city, which was set to become one of the great British commercial cities in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.



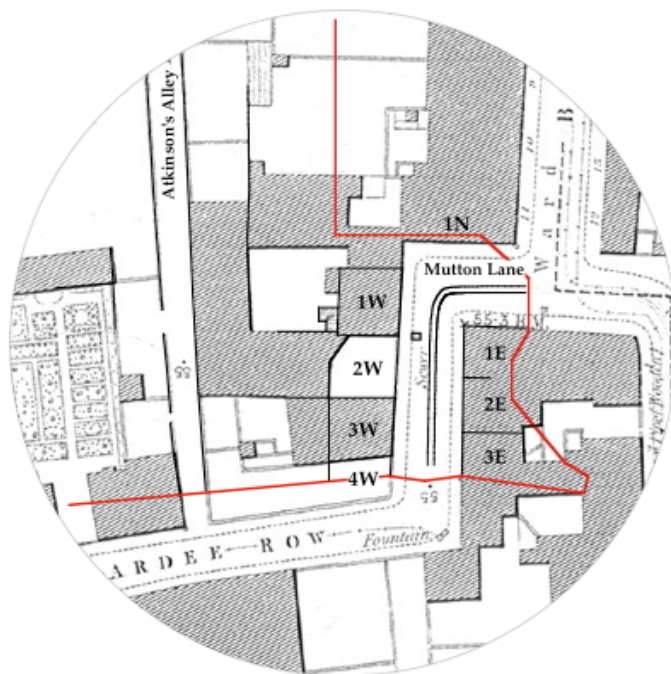
Bottom of barrelbase, timber 14 (C190)



Top side of barrelbase, timber 14 (C190)

Private development along Mutton Lane in the late seventeenth century

The population of Dublin increased exponentially following the Confederate Wars, partly as the city had gained a reputation amongst Protestants from the European continent as a safe and tolerant place to settle. Much of the expansion occurred along either side of the medieval thoroughfare of the Coombe. Thus, the areas to the north and south of the Coombe axis, equating roughly to the old Liberties of St. Thomas and Donore, became known simply as 'The Liberties'. The urban component of the Liberty of Donore developed into a centre for textile crafts, and particularly weaving, that were pursued by the arriving immigrants. The textile trade in the area was focused on Weaver's Square to the southwest of the site (McCullough 1989, 59).



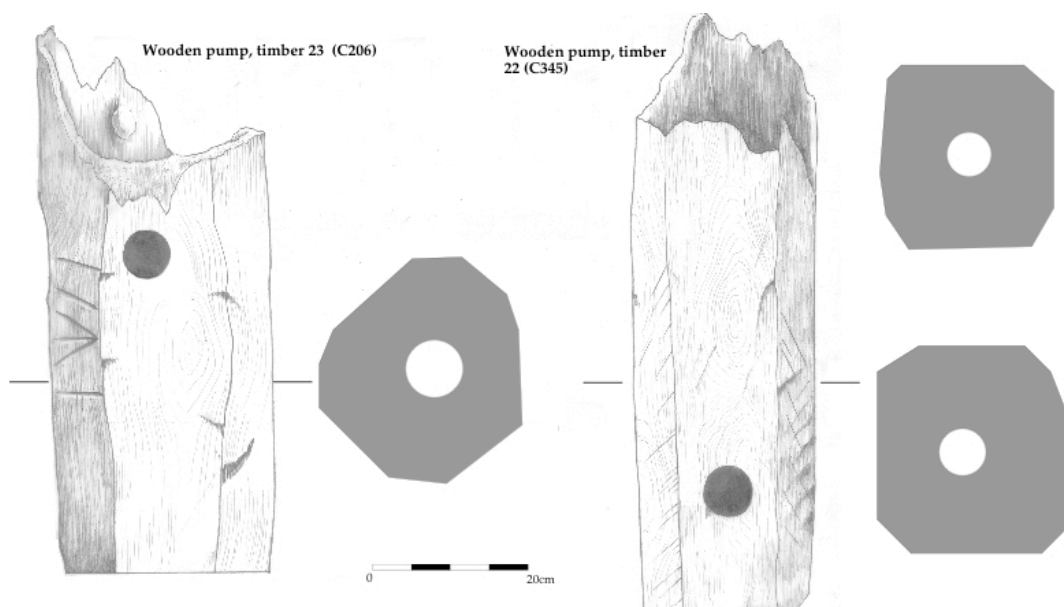
The development of Mutton Lane appears to have followed a pattern that was typical of late seventeenth century Dublin. The private landowner's surveyor laid out an urban block which was leased to building speculators for a term of years (generally between 40 and 99) at an established ground rent (McCullough 1989, 31). The archaeological evidence suggests that one building speculator leased out the left hand side of Mutton Lane, with another taking the right. The block to the

left of the lane extended back to Atkinson's Alley, which was also established at this time to facilitate the development on the area.

The speculator who leased the block to the west of Mutton Lane possessed enough land for four terraced houses, each 6m across and 16m long (20' by 52'), backing towards, but not onto, Atkinson's Alley. Developments of mini-terraces like this were typical in late seventeenth and eighteenth century Dublin, and it is interesting to note that one of the earliest Irish examples is depicted on a 1635 representation of St. Thomas' Abbey, located just to the north of the site (McCullough 1989, 29 & 111). Similar plot sizes of 20' by 67' are recorded in Patrick Street from approximately this time (*ibid*, 25). Once completed, the building speculator then leased out the building to residents for a specified period of time, with the expectation of making a profit.

The excavation revealed that the builder had constructed all four houses to the west of Mutton Lane at the same time and to the same plan. The floor plan used was typical of contemporary buildings in the Liberties: an emphasis on economic use of space in narrow plots; stone-lined basements housing kitchen and stores, brick built superstructures housing the formal room, family room and bedrooms; corner fireplaces with chimney-stacks shared by each pair of buildings; and probably gabled roofs (McCullough 1989, 99-110). Late seventeenth century houses of this type are sometimes called Dutch Billys (Walsh 1973, 64), and examples of these are still standing near the site on The Coombe, St. Thomas' Road, Poole Street and Chamber Street. The houses on the eastern side of Mutton Lane were probably similar in style.

Mutton Lane itself appears to have been formally laid out to an even width (6-8m), and must have been sufficiently surfaced for coal or similar carts to travel along from the late seventeenth century, as the coal-chutes were original features of the houses lining the lane. It is unlikely that services for clean or foul water would have been laid along Mutton Lane until later in the eighteenth century. Atkinson's Alley was also established at this time, and developed along its western side. Surprisingly, both foul water and clean water services appear to have been laid along the Alley at this earlier period, at the end of the seventeenth century and early in the eighteenth century. The relatively ephemeral evidence for this early clean water service suggested it was formed from underground timber pipes, rising up at a barrel-lined cistern or fountain where it could be tapped, and probably continuing along a trough above ground level. Rectangular pits, placed at regular intervals along the length of the system, may have contained public washing facilities.



The residents of Mutton Lane in the eighteenth century

Although the Liberties became associated with poverty later on, this was not the case in the eighteenth century. The residents at the *Timberyard*, with addresses along Mutton Lane, were probably skilled craftspeople, most likely involved in the textile trade, and may have come from the European Continent.

Mutton Lane is first marked by Brooking on his 1728 map of Dublin as being lined with buildings along its east-west length, however, based on evidence recovered from the excavation it is apparent that his depiction has been simplified and that the actual course of the laneway is less straight than shown. Rocque's 1756 map of Dublin is a more accurate source. Here, Mutton Lane is shown running eastwards from Crooked Staff (Ardee Street), then taking a dog-leg to the north before continuing eastwards, passing Truck Street and Cuckold's Row (both now Brabazon Row) and changing its name to Hunt Alley. Rocque shows a tanning yard and industrial buildings to either side of the west end of Mutton Lane, whilst at its eastern end and along the dog-leg, the lane is lined with narrow residential properties. Earlier cartographic sources (from 1610 and 1656) do not depict the area in sufficient detail for Mutton Lane to be shown, but the excavation results suggested it did not exist prior to c. 1700.

The later Ordnance Survey maps continue to show the same distinctive dog-leg of the laneway, though the name changes to Ardee Row in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Ardee Row and the names of many of the streets in the surrounding area are derived from the names and titles of Sir Edward Brabazon, knight and Baron of Ardee, whose son William was the Earl of Meath and who was granted the lands of the Abbey of St. Thomas the Martyr (i.e. the Liberty of St. Thomas and Donore) in the sixteenth century.

Underground ovens.

Three of the four basements (1W, 2W and 4W) to the west of Mutton lane had a hole in the rear wall that led to a brick-lined underground oven. These ovens did not appear to have been constructed during the initial building of the basements, as each was slightly different, however they must have been constructed relatively quickly afterwards as they were blocked up during the construction



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of the semicircular fireplaces and new chimney stacks of Basements 1W and 2W. It is possible that they were constructed one by one, in a casual manner, as the Basement 1W



oven appears to have been too large, leading the builders to skew the shape and size of the subsequent oven in Basement 2W.

Each of the ovens was accessed by a narrow opening located in the western walls of the basements, in each case in the same location as the fireplace. The

openings were rectangular in shape with a rounded arch and measured 480mm-670mm in height and 570mm in width. They were lined with bricks laid side by side, bonded by a lime mortar. The base of the opening was located c. 500mm above the basement floor.

The openings led into circular brick-lined ovens that measured between c. 1.5m (behind Basement 2W) and c. 2m (behind Basements 1W and 4W) in diameter. The ovens were lined with handmade red brick bonded by a soft greyish lime mortar. The chambers were low, particularly around the sides, and the walls were built by laying bricks horizontally, then vertically, and so on gradually creating a brick dome (which did not survive). No traces of burning was found in the ovens of Basements 1W and 2W, and in both cases it was noted that the floors had a rough and unfinished look. During the archaeological excavation, it was hypothesised that the ovens had never been used, or that they had functioned as drying rooms rather than as ovens.

The mystery of the lack of burning evidence was solved during the excavation of oven 4W. Here, three oven tiles were found along one side of the floor, and it became clear that similar tiles had once lined all three of the oven bases, and perhaps sides, and that these had been removed after the ovens had fallen into disuse. The reason for their removal is not obvious, but the fabric of the tiles was packed with gravel temper in order to withstand extreme heat, and they may have been difficult to obtain and consequently quite valuable. The upper surface of the three surviving tiles was blackened and burnt. The burnt material was examined by an archaeobotanist, however no environmental evidence survived to suggest a function for the ovens.

These ovens appear to be amongst the earliest alterations made by the new residents (or possibly the builders). They are highly unusual, and have not been encountered on any of the previous excavations of residential structures of similar date at Ardee Street and Newmarket. The ovens may have been constructed with particular crafts in mind, or in view of the cultural preferences of the occupants. Either way, they appear to have been blocked-up relatively soon after they were constructed, perhaps just one generation later.

Stoves and possible northern European origins

Further changes were made to the interior of the Mutton Lane buildings during the first half of the eighteenth century, particularly in two adjoining properties (Nos. 1W and 2W) which had their chimney stacks rebuilt at a much larger scale and large recessed stove-placings installed in the basements (which at the time operated as kitchens), along with new floors and openings. The stove-placings completely blocked the earlier sunken ovens in Nos. 1W and 2W (however the oven in 4W may have continued to be used).

These possible stove-placings were large brick and masonry constructions abutting the basement lining and reaching the full height of the basement supporting the chimney stack above, incorporating a semi-circular niche measuring 1.33m wide and 760mm deep. A small brick support survived in the base of the niche of the 2W placing. No evidence of burning was found on the walls, also supporting the idea that these were niches for stoves. These stove-placings were not present in all of the properties, for example the next residence along the row (numbered 3W) had a brick-built corner fireplace (with several phases of repair noted) with residues along its base and chimney of soot and burning. The stove-placings were not original to the cellars and pottery found behind them provided a date range of c. 1670-1740, suggesting that they may have been constructed in the early eighteenth century. Both stove-placings were later completely blocked up in a rough manner with demolition rubble, from which nineteenth century pottery and a coin dating to 1808 were recovered. The blocked niches were then heavily plastered over, demonstrating that the basements remained in use during the nineteenth century, but perhaps no longer functioned as the kitchen of the house, or indeed reflecting developments in stove technology.

Another significant point regarding the installation of stoves (as opposed to more usual fireplaces) is that this may suggest that the inhabitants had a northern European background. This would not be surprising, as historical sources suggest that the Liberties attracted many such immigrants at this time.

Other features

Services for foul and clean water were laid along Atkinson's Alley, the rear lane running behind the Mutton Lane plots, from the early eighteenth century. The foul water drain was lined with stone, but was not connected to the privies located to the rear of the Mutton Lane plots. Instead, the privy pits, which were shared between pairs of adjacent properties, would have needed to be emptied by hand. Relatively few chamber pots were recovered from the outhouses, and in fact these were more frequently found in the construction fill over the laneway services. This might suggest that chamber pots, and their contents, were discarded directly onto the street in the absence of public drains or at times when drains were blocked. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that new toilets connected to the foul-water drain were constructed. This development is mirrored elsewhere in Dublin (Corcoran 2005, 21-2), and it is interesting to note that each building now had an individual toilet, located in outhouses in the rear plots, unlike the earlier eighteenth century facilities that had been shared between each pair of properties.

A number of phases of timber pipes providing clean water were also laid along the Atkinson's Alley during the eighteenth century. The water from the later phase of pipes was accessed through fountains or cisterns, comprising wooden barrels or boxes set into the ground attached to timber pumps. One of these fountains, which had been rebuilt and altered a number of times, may have been public, but the other two appear to have been in private ownership. A particularly impressive private vaulted brick-lined cistern, possibly constructed at the end of the eighteenth century, provided a very large amount of water to one of the residences. This particular property also had a stone-lined well in the basement, and a second stone-lined well in the back yard. It seems likely that this resident required large quantities of water for his or her profession, or else was selling the water on to his or her neighbours.

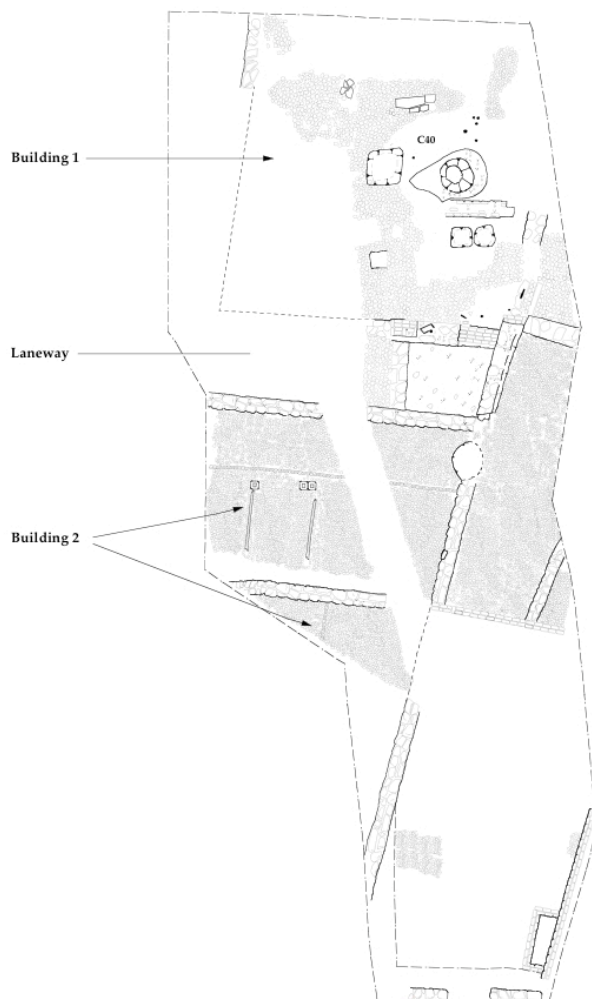
By the middle of the eighteenth century Atkinson's Alley was fully developed with houses along the west side, however the east side remained undeveloped until the nineteenth century. This 'no man's land' appears to have been used primarily by the west-side Atkinson's Lane residents during the earlier part of the eighteenth century, and then by the west-side Mutton Lane residents in the latter part of the eighteenth century and start of the nineteenth century, judging from the distribution of services running through it.

The material remains of the Mutton Lane residents indicated that they had access to a wide range of local and imported goods. The early eighteenth century ceramic assemblage is comparable to numerous previously-excavated contemporary residential sites. The presence of numerous eighteenth century wine bottles suggests a degree of financial comfort, however the absence of corporate or other bottle seals indicates that wine was

bought locally rather than imported in bulk (to fill a personal cellar), and correlates well with other evidence suggesting that the occupants were moderately well off, but not very wealthy. Many of the wine bottles, at least one of which may have been imported, and possible wine glasses, were recovered from one of the Mutton Lane buildings, possibly indicating an occupant with a particular taste for wine. The domestic nature of the residences was further highlighted by the recovery of a large number of ceramic marbles and some gaming pieces, representing occasional losses by children, or unrecovered stashes of childhood treasures.

The decline of Mutton Lane and nineteenth century industrialisation

The economic downturn in Britain and Ireland in the 1820s was strongly felt in the Liberty of Donore which was hit hard by the collapse of the textile trade in the 1820s and 1830s.



Ceramic evidence from the excavation is particularly interesting in this regard, and the limited range of creamware may indicate that the Mutton Lane households were in financial hardship from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. As the Liberty of Donore became poorer, the wealthier inhabitants moved out and were rapidly replaced by industrialists, who introduced large-scale distilling, iron-working and tanning industries, which further aggravated the area's decline. Such industries had always been present in the Liberties and, for example, tanning was undertaken off New Street from the medieval period. It was not until the nineteenth century, however, that these industries began to dominate the area.

By the mid-nineteenth century many of the houses along Mutton Lane and Atkinson's Alley had been demolished and no further extensive improvements were made to the buildings that remained. The surviving buildings along Atkinson's Alley became tenements. However, as living conditions in the Liberties continued to decline, public

works were carried out to improve sanitation. A series of fountains connected by a new set of wooden pipes replaced the eighteenth century clean water supply that had fallen into disuse along Atkinson's Alley and Mutton Lane. This situation has also been recorded in other parts of Dublin (Corcoran 2005, 31). A large brick-lined culverted sewer was also constructed along Mutton Lane in the later nineteenth century.

The foundry

Much of the western half of the *Timberyard* site was by taken up by an industrial foundry. Extensive groundworks were undertaken to construct the large underground furnace system for the foundry, and the undeveloped space on the block was occupied by yards for the storage of metallurgical materials and waste.

Although parts of the foundry may have been in place as early as the mid- eighteenth century, the earliest concrete evidence for its construction was in the mid-nineteenth century. At this time the foundry complex comprised a large yard behind Ardee Street surrounded by buildings. A narrow lane led to the east into a second yard space, also surrounded by buildings, that was accessed from Mutton Lane. This second yard is depicted on contemporary maps as an ornamental garden, but the excavation results suggested that it held large pits or bins for storing metallurgical material.



The excavation revealed three of the foundry buildings and parts of associated laneways and yards, which were well preserved and often showed signs of having been remodeled during the use of the complex. Large granite flagstones and metal fittings were set into the surface of the cobbled floors, probably to support the large machinery used in the foundry.

Of particular interest was the furnace system constructed below Building 1. This had required extensive sub-surface ground works (up to 3.5m in depth) that removed all traces of previous buildings in the area, in order to install an underground timber pipe (with a 5" bore), leading to a large wooden stave-built barrel and up through an underground brick-lined chimney, which led into the floor of Building 1. The pipe, barrel and chimney appear

to have formed a type of blast furnace, in which air was pumped through one end pipe towards Building 1, before rising up through the barrel and up the chimney. This blast of air would have caused coke, limestone and iron ore held in a crucible above the hole in Building 1's floor to combust. The molten metal would then have been tapped and poured into prepared moulds.

The floor of Building 2 contained two inbuilt slots, 1.6m apart, holding timber runners which may have been tracks for a wheeled vehicle of some sort. Both slots terminated to the north against large square granite postpad blocks that would have held a metal support for a mezzanine, crane or other device used in filling or emptying the vehicle.

This foundry complex is listed as '*James Haigh, engineer, mill wright, brass and iron works*' at Ardee Street in 19th century Dublin Almanacs. It was founded in the early 1820s by James and William Haigh, who prior to that had traded as millwrights and machine makers around the corner on Cork Street. Haigh's ironworks appears to have expanded and contracted through the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, at which point his premises was listed as '*Jas. Haigh, engineer, mill wright, brass and iron works & James Haigh, civil engineer and valuer*



of mills and machinery'. Haigh is listed until 1878, after which the ironworks closed down and his Ardee Street premises became vacant or in tenements. The 1886 Ordnance Survey revision depicts ruins where the foundry once stood.

When the ironworks was closed, all of the foundry machinery appears to have been removed, including the metal bins or basins used to store waste, and indeed nothing of any use appears to have remained. The metallurgical waste itself was left on the floor of the foundry buildings and yards, where it spread out and backfilled the holes left by the removed machinery. Eventually the roof collapsed leaving a layer of broken slates and pantiles over the cobbled floors. Sometime later, the walls of the foundry were demolished producing a thick deposit of rubble over the site, sealing the remains and raising the ground level for later nineteenth century construction.

Blackening generally referred to a black shoe dressing used to polish shoes, but the same term was used to refer to a substance used to preserve metal, especially ranges. The manufacture of both shoe blackening and stove blackening involved the heating of a number of ingredients to create a paste (Fenner's Complete Formulary, 1888). As large quantities of water were not required in the manufacture of blackening, it seems unlikely that the blackening was manufactured at this washing facility. It is more likely that blackening was being made nearby at an adjacent building incorporating an under-floor kiln. The pit may represent a laundry or a rinsing pit for leather goods (shoes?) before they were sent to be blackened, which was filled in with waste after it went out of use.

The sunken washing pit described above was found to truncate an earlier similar installation, which again contained the same blackening deposit, suggesting that this washing/blackening process had been carried out over a long period, perhaps from the middle of the eighteenth century as suggested by the dating of the pottery assemblage. Interestingly, this period coincides with the operation of the tannery excavated immediately to the east of the Timberyard site (Linnane 2004). The tanning and blackening-related industries were complimentary as both involved leather. Furthermore, *Thom's Directory* lists this resident as a blackening and match manufacturer, an odd-sounding combination that makes more sense when one considers that both matches (which underwent much development in the nineteenth century) and leather shoe blackening both required **gum Arabic** in their manufacture. However, 'blackening' was also a term used for a paste used in the protection of metal. This form of blackening was made from lamp black, a ready supply of which would have been available from the foundry and the blackening itself may have been used on the products of the foundry.

Conclusions.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century all of the industries that had operated at the *Timberyard* had collapsed, the remaining houses were in ruins or falling apart, and the residents lived in poverty. Part of the old foundry yard became a timber yard in the twentieth century, from which the present development obtains its name.

Overall, the results of the excavation describe a picture of the rise and fall of the site, one that mirrors the development of the Liberties of Thomas Court and Donore. The mud, stones and bricks, the broken fragments of discarded pottery and rubbish below the *Timberyard* site, all provide a rich seam of information that can be tapped to shed light on the people who lived and worked on the site in the centuries preceding ours. Thus, fragments of the lives and histories of these individuals, undocumented in the surviving records of the day which focus on men of civic note, can be reconstructed. The farmers

who tilled the fields on the site at the end of the medieval period; the late seventeenth century land owner and building speculators who planned the development of Mutton Lane and Atkinson's Alley; the builders who erected the buildings and laid the services in the streets; the eighteenth century residents of the buildings, probably skilled textile craftspeople who immigrated from the Continent, and their children (represented by the particularly fine assemblage of marbles); the builders of the furnace below James Haigh's foundry, and the iron and brass workers; the blacking manufacturers, nailers, tanners and toilet-pit emptiers; all these people left their mark on the archaeological record.

The full report on the excavation and finds assemblage is accessible on line (www.arch-tech.ie/timberyard.html) and the complete excavation archive is available at the *Dublin City Archaeological Archive* in the Gilbert Library (Ref. DCAA.03.02). The project was funded by Dublin City Council.

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