

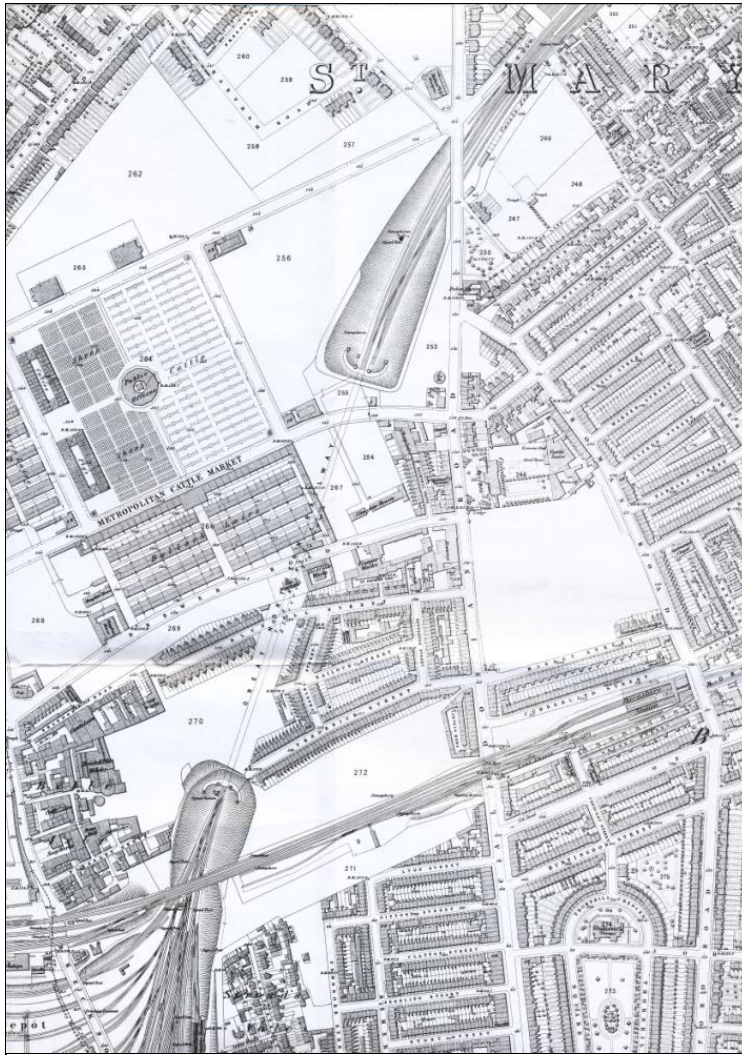
SGI 14 Caledonian Park

London Borough of Islington

Caledonian Park, Market Road, Islington

Grid reference: TQ 3024 8478 Clock Tower

Caledonian Park



Extract from the 1871 OS map showing the tunnel from King's Cross underneath the Caledonian Market

Caledonian Park is chosen as a Site of Geological interest on account that it was, for a short time, a brickfield where interesting fossils, 50 million years old were found. Caledonian Park was afterwards the site of the Caledonian Cattle Market that began operation in 1855 but by the time of the First World War it had started to decline and was finally closed in 1939 at the start of the Second World War. The parallel flea market survived the longest. This live meat market moved from Smithfield (the Smooth Field outside the walls of the City of London) which became a market for dead meat only. The site was close to the goods yards of King's Cross and animals could be herded the short route up York Way to the market.

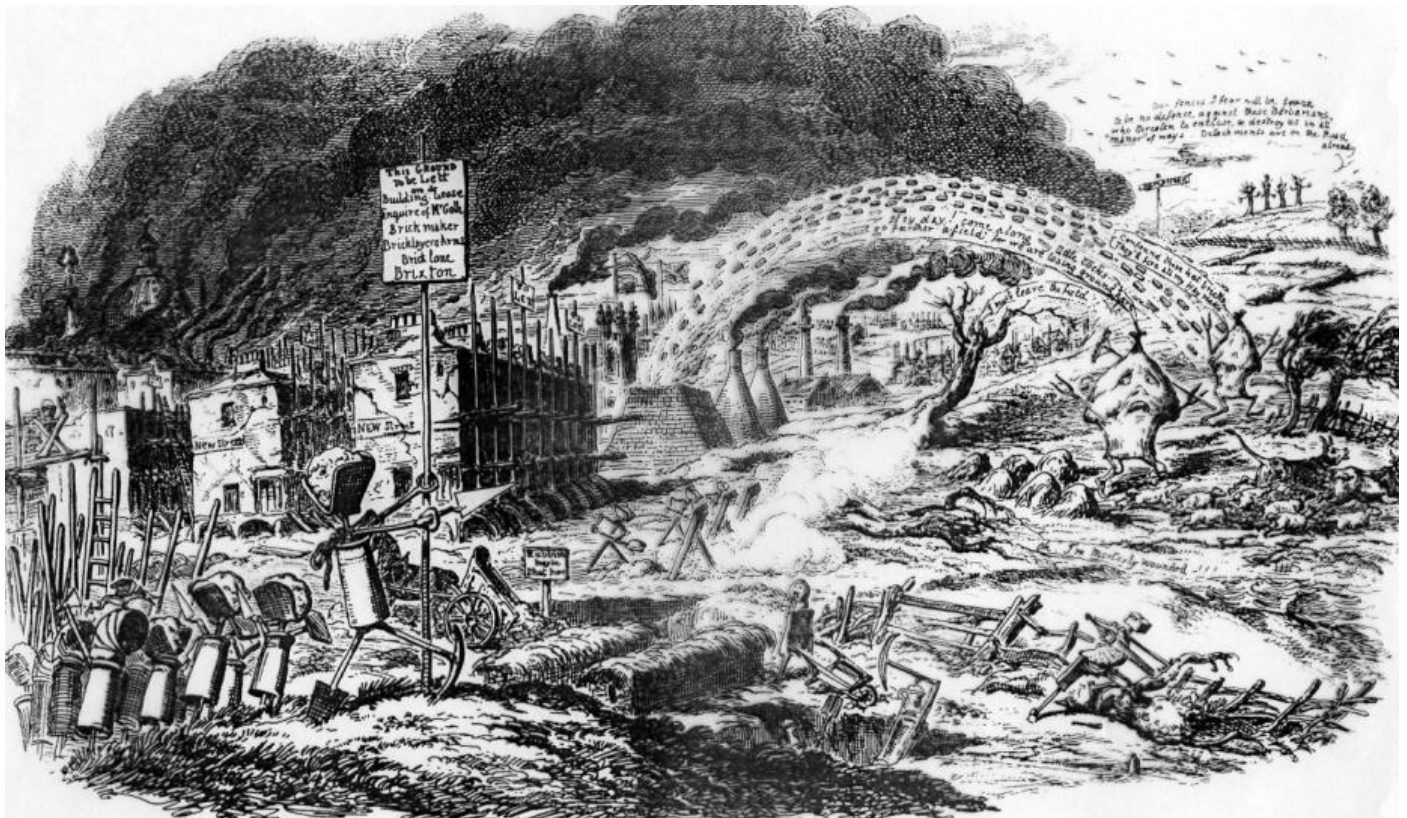
Brickmaking on Caledonian Fields

Before the arrival of the market the area was fields upon which bricks were made. The clay came from the London Clay beneath the fields when tunnels were dug for the trains into and out of Kings Cross. The railway opened in 1852 and prior to that the dug clay excavated from the tunnels was laid out on the fields to weather before being made into bricks. This provided a bonanza for fossil collectors and many fine examples are to be found in the Natural History Museum. After weathering over winter the clay was mixed with sand and chalk to stop shrinkage. Ash was added to the mix to provide organic material to aid the firing process. Brick-making tended to be an itinerant trade, often operated by families. The clay and other

ingredients were mixed in a pugmill with water, and then kneaded, much as dough, to make it smooth and pliable. From images and descriptions this seems to have been women's work. Often it was the father who was the clot-moulder and it was his job to throw the processed clay into the mould. Very often it was the older boys who did the donkey work of carrying first the clay and then the finished bricks on special barrows. The bricks were stacked into low hacks to dry out for about six weeks before being rebuilt into a large clamp. Kindling was pushed into the centre and lit for just a few days, then removed and the organic material added to the clay did the rest. This process lasted a further six weeks until the clamp was cool and it was dismantled. The bricks on the outside of the clamp were under-fired and went back into the next clamp, the ones in the centre, the clinker, were not suitable for building but often ended up in garden walls as welded lumps. They did not travel far and are a good indicator of nearby brick works. The malms, the best bricks, were used on the exteriors of houses. This low temperature process resulted in the familiar yellow London stock bricks ubiquitous in housing of this period. The picture below of the Marl Pond in Caledonian Road may well have been painted from the east side of Copenhagen Fields, bordering the Caledonian Road. It depicts the pugmill sitting on top of a mound of clay. As the excess water drained out of the clay it formed a pond at the base which the locals took full advantage of as a skating rink.

Other local brickmaking

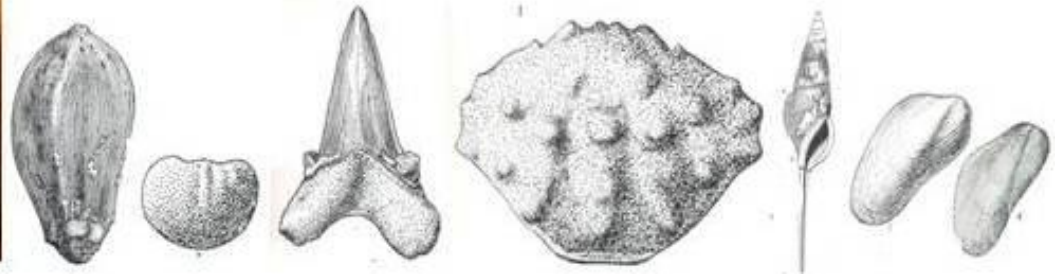
Many of the fields of Islington disappeared at this time. As the demand for housing increased the open area left for the dairy farmers became smaller and the cattle were often kept inside for long periods on a very unwholesome mix. Not surprisingly they became diseased and the two principle dairy farmers, Mr Rhodes and Mr Laycock turned their remaining fields over to the more profitable business of brick making. To the east of the Caledonian Road Brickearth, overlying gravels is a wind-blown loess derived from retreating glaciers, possibly as recent as 20,000 years ago and reworked by water to supply a clay that has just the right mix of sand and chalk without the need for adding them to the clay, unlike the underlying much older London Clay. Once the Brickearth was worked out the bricks were used on the spot for house-building. The painting of the Stonesfield Estate brickfields (Liverpool Road) below shows a simpler pugmill to the one used on the Caledonian Road – only organic material needed to be added to the Brickearth (more properly, Langley Silt) found in this area. In this painting the clay was sent by gravity down a chute to the brick-maker's bench where it was processed. The special barrow can be seen on the right-hand side of the picture, used to transport the bricks for building into the low hacks depicted along the middle distance. Once the clay had dried out, the bricks would have been rebuilt into the large clamps for firing (not shown in this image). A marvellous cartoon by Cruikshank captures the period beautifully.



London Going out of Town or the March of Bricks and Mortar by George Cruikshank, 1829

What the fossils tell us about the London Clay environment

Fifty-five million years ago this area was under a moderately deep sea with the closest land somewhere towards the Midlands. The temperature was hot and wet and muddy rivers flowed into the sea depositing a fine clay, often including the leaves and fruit of land plants. Quite large logs also turn up within the London Clay along with numerous smaller fragments. Very occasionally the fossils of land animals of the time are found and even rarer are the occasional very delicate fossils of birds. It is the plants that give us the biggest clues to the environment of the time. The *Nipa* palm is a common fossil and this plant is still found today in places such as Malaysia, in a climate very different to the one experienced now in the UK. There are also flowering plants such as *Magnolia* which give some indication of different seasons. At the time Britain was lying at 41° north, the same as Barcelona, Rome and Istanbul today. Summer temperatures in those cities are similar to Malaysia. Islington is now almost entirely built over and it is no longer possible to find any fossils but a visit to Warden Point on the Isle of Sheppey in the Thames Estuary can be productive. The majority of fossils are marine molluscs such as bivalves and gastropods but commonly there were also crabs, lobsters, fish, sharks and turtles. Many fossils from Copenhagen Fields ended up in the Natural History Museum although sadly they are not on display to the public.



A Natural History Museum label for a lobster found when the tunnels were being excavated. Copenhagen House was demolished to make way for the cattle market. Dr Wetherell was a local physician who paid workmen for fossils by offering them free doctoring.

Six examples of London Clay Fossils: Nipa fruit, Magnolia seed, shark's tooth, crab, snail, bivalve

© Natural History Museum

Caledonian Park today

In the late 1960s housing was built around three sides of the perimeter but the centre of the site remained open space and was laid out as Caledonian Park in 1970. The Clock Tower in the centre and the perimeter railings along Market Road remain as a reminder of the former Cattle Market. There is a very fine view over London from the top of the Clock Tower. In 2016 a successful Heritage Lottery Bid provided funds to conserve the Clock Tower. In addition the adjacent proposed *Cally Clock Tower Centre* will be a public space with facilities for the local community, including educational displays and activities, a café and accessible toilets, due to be completed in 2018.

Access

Caledonian Park is a public Park with pedestrian access from Market Road on the south side. It is open from 8 am to dusk. There is limited meter parking in Market Road. The nearest underground station is Caledonian Road on the Piccadilly line. It is served by the 274 bus along Market Road, the 390 bus along York Way to the West and the 17, 91, 259 and 273 along Caledonian Road to the east.



The Marl Pond 1840, near Hagbush Cottage and Copenhagen House (between York Way and Caledonian Road) showing the pugmill on top of the clay mound with the frozen pond in the foreground



Brickmaking on the Stonefields Estate (Liverpool Road)

References

George Cruikshank, 1829: www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/losing-londons-common-ground

Fossil images: Natural History Museum Fossil-Explorer App: www.nhm.ac.uk/take-part/identify-nature/fossil-explorer-app.html

Marl Pond & Stonesfield Estate: Islington Local History Centre: www.islington.gov.uk/libraries-arts-and-heritage/heritage/local-history-centre

A history of the market with numerous pictures: <http://alondoninheritance.com/tag/metropolitan-cattle-market>