

# The history and development of smithfield market



Smithfield Market started life out in the middle ages as a wide Grassy space, just outside the northern wall of the City of London, due to its easy access grazing space and water, it was used as London's main livestock market. Smithfield market can be traced back to over 800 years ago, as in 1174 the cleric and administrator for Thomas Becket; William Fitzstephen, travelled to London and commented on Smithfield Market and observed " a field where every friday fine horses are to be sold" Pigs and sheeps were also observed to be traded. This carried on for many years, but however due to fighting and dueling (sometimes to the death) were fairly commonplace, in 1615 railings and sewers were provided in a way of combating this. Just a mere 21 years later in 1636, the City of London formally established Smithfield Market as a cattle market.

As the City of London expanded, so did the need for meat, and therefore so did the market. By around 1750s, 75, 000 cattle and over 500 thousand sheep were sold each year. These numbers steadily increased and within 100 years over 200 thousand cattle and over 1 million sheep were sold each year. This goes to show just how prosperous the meat industry was, and it can be argued that the expansion of the meat industry, in this case Smithfield Market, had a massive impact on the economy and prosperity of the City of London.

A birds eye view of the market

By the 1850's " dead" meat was being sold as well as cattle, this meant that live cattle were being driven to the market and in some cases slaughtered on site. This meant that the streets were often an unclean and bloody place to

be, especially due to the fact that the old drainage channels couldn't cope with the blood and entrails of over way over a million animals every year. However this was remedied in 1855 when the market was closed. And remained closed until 1868, where it came with its own underground station linking the market other large stations making travel to and from the market more accessible, thus increasing customers and growing the numbers of customers it hadn't seen since its early days of booming. The Gentleman in charged of designing and reopening the new market, by the name of Horace Jones also went on to design Billingsgate market and Tower bridge. This is relevant as it just goes to show how old Smithfield is and how integral it is when it comes to English, especially London History.

The Smithfield market continued to remain busy for most of the 20th century despite closure for WW2 (since the men working at the market went to war) and the Blitzkrieg which caused damage to areas near the market resulting in many casualties. In the 1990s, the Market was modernised to meet EC regulations, with new modernised loading bays and chiller rooms. However in more recent years the looming fear of redevelopment hangs over Smithfield. With all other wholesale Markets being closed down or removed from central London there may always be a shadow over Smithfield to end its current trade. However today Smithfield is still selling over 100 thousand tons of meet every year, however far from its historical self, is now surrounded by clubs, bars and restaurants, which infringe on the Markets boundaries, perhaps trying to push it out of London.