

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT OF  
LAND AT KING ST / ST HELENS ST, DERBY**

## **An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of Land at King St / St Helens St, Derby**

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## Summary

- **Background.** This desk-top assessment was carried out by Trent & Peak Archaeological Unit on behalf of Pikington McPhee Ltd. Its scope was agreed verbally with archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority.
- **Location and description.** The site lies on the northern edge of the city centre, at the junction of King Street and St. Helen's Street.
- **Proposed scheme.** New residential units and car park area.
- **Medieval context.** The site lies close to or on to the Anglo-Saxon church of St Helens, dating from before 1066. It could also contain urban settlement plots or town defences. In the medieval period it was probably part of the medieval hospital of St Helens.
- **Post-medieval development.** The site contains parts of the former gardens and orchards of Old St. Helens House, a residence built on the hospital site.
- **Post-war development.** The site was not built-up until the early 19th century. Those buildings stood until demolition connected with the construction of the Inner Ring Road in the 1970s.
- **Archaeological potential and Impact of development.** The long use of gardens and lack of intensive post-medieval development suggest that preservation of archaeological remains may be good. The new buildings may be expected to damage or destroy those remains.
- **Recommendations for further work.** A scheme of field evaluation should be drawn up in consultation with the archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority. It should aim to establish the extent depth thickness and nature of archaeological remains over the site. This can assist in identifying measures to avoid damage from the new buildings. Where damage is unavoidable, full excavation should be carried out to place the remains on record, prior to construction of the new scheme.

## **1 Project background, site location and brief description of the proposed scheme**

This desk-top assessment was commissioned by Pilkington McPhee Partnership in advance of redevelopment of a site at the junction of King Street and St. Helen's Street, Derby. With the agreement of Andy Myers, the archaeological advisor to the Local Planning Authority, it draws substantially on two recent works, Steer 2002 and Hislop 2003 and references therein. The other key sources are Craven 1988 and works by David Roffe.

## **2 Background: The borough of Derby**

### **Anglo-Saxon period**

#### ***Middle Saxon settlements***

Continuous settlement in the core of the town can be traced back to middle Saxon times. Around the minster church dedicated to St. Alkmund, excavations carried out in the 1970s revealed, beneath the Victorian church, a sequence of earlier churches extending back from the 15th century to before the 9th century, together with numerous carved cross shafts and grave covers of Anglo-Saxon date, including the possible sarcophagus of St Alkmund himself (Radford 1976). Some 10th-century charcoal graves were also found. The minster status indicates the presence of a monastic community, and the church may have formed the focus of a small high status settlement; it was certainly a centre for pilgrimage relating to the saint's remains (Craven 1988, 22-3). The extent of this settlement is completely unknown, but it could perhaps extend into the development site which lies about 120m to the west.

A second pre-Viking focus has been postulated around St Werburgh's, some 400m south of the development site: the saint died in 699 and after her death a number of church dedications were made across the Mercian kingdom. The street name Wardwick (meaning Walda's farm) preserves the name of a settlement documented in Domesday Book and together with the early likely dedication date of the church suggests that another pre-Viking focus may have existed in this area (Fig. 2).

St Alkmund's and St Werburgh's lay within a large middle-Saxon estate called Northworthy, extending across south Derbyshire. The name means literally the northern estate or enclosure (in contrast with Repton to the south, with which it was connected; Roffe 1987).

#### ***Viking occupation***

The Saxon kingdom of Mercia, within which Northworthy lay, was overrun by the Viking Great Army in 873AD. A fight took place between Vikings and Anglo-Saxons at a fortified place called Derby in 917 (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle), but the scale of this action and its location are unknown. It is therefore not impossible that it could lie within the development site (amongst other possibilities), though there is no direct evidence for this. Current thinking however favours Little Chester, the name *Derby* recalling the Roman settlement at *Derventio* (Little Chester), only later becoming associated with the Late Saxon town, created after the conquest of Mercia from the Vikings.

#### ***The Anglo-Saxon borough***

In 945 Derby is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as one of five boroughs along with Lincoln, Leicester, Nottingham and Stamford. The West Saxons had evidently created at Derby a fortified borough or *burh*, one of a series across the north Midlands, to act as a centre for organised resistance to the continued Viking threat.

Eight churches and fourteen mills are recorded in Domesday Book (1086). The churches can all be identified from later contexts: St Alkmund's, St Michael's, All Saints (the cathedral), St Werburgh's, St Helen's, St James's, St. Peter's and St Mary's (Craven 1988, 28). 243 burgesses held properties in 1066 (though these had declined to 100 in 1086).

These known churches show that the site chosen for the burh was based on a ridge of gravel terrace with natural defences to the east and west provided by the river Derwent and the Markeaton Brook (Fig. 2). A ditch referred to in the Darley Abbey Cartulary of c.1275 as the "town ditch", located on the line of later Bridge Gate, may have been burghal defences, in which case the defences probably extended from river to river, cutting off the northern end of the ridge (Craven 1988, 26). A new minster church dedicated to All Saints was built at the centre of the new burh and a mint was set up producing coinage impressed with the name Derby. Trade increased rapidly and population with it. The interior of the burh was probably laid out with a regular grid of streets attached to a central north/south road on the line of Queen Street and Iron Gate. In this case St. Alkmund's will have stood adjacent to the main north gate of the burh. If the town ditch's course is reflected in Bridge Street, the line on the west side had completely disappeared by 1610 at least and possibly much earlier (Fig. 3): by this time also the main road leading north from the

borough was King Street, on a significant offset west of the central high street, possibly caused by a need to skirt the supposed settlement around St Alkmunds. However, a reference in 1275 to encroachment on the *King's Highway* by the warden of St Helen's hospital suggested to Steer that the original straight line may have been retained until at least the 13th century (Steer 2002, identifying Darley Grove as the King's Highway).

### Medieval period

The town grew slowly during the twelfth century (Fig. 3) and was already served by a market when in 1204 a charter recognised the town's borough status and granted the right to hold a great market from Thursday night to Friday night. Much of Derby's early prosperity was probably based on the manufacture of woollen cloth, perhaps the most significant manufacturing concern in the East Midlands in the earlier part of the Middle Ages. In Derby the name Walker Lane (lane of the fullers) first recorded in 1263 points to the presence of this industry within the medieval town. In addition the charter of 1204 lent protection to this industry by forbidding the working of dyed cloth within 10 leagues of the Derby (except in Nottingham). Alabaster working, from the thirteenth century, and iron working (the name Iron Gate was first recorded in 1483) were also importance facets of the medieval economy of Derby.

Derby probably expanded beyond its pre-conquest extents in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but the Black Death of 1349 and the general economic decline of the middle fourteenth century led to a prolonged fall in population. The extent of the late medieval town can be reasonably supposed to be that shown in John Speed's map of 1610 (Fig. 3): the town had expanded south and west of the Markeaton Brook.

### Post medieval Derby

The town continued to expand during the post-medieval period, most notably along Friar Gate to the west. In the early 18th century the Derwent Navigation Act led to the improvement of the river for waterborne transport and which promoted the rapid growth of industry in the town. In the later 18th and 19th centuries industrial activity encroached increasingly on the fringes of the town and from the mid-19th century onward extensive suburban housing developments began to infill fields around the town.

## 3 The development site and its immediate environs

Moneypenny's map of 1791 shows that the development site includes former gardens and orchard on the south side of a building fronting King Street (Fig. 5). The building depicted by Moneypenny was Old St Helen's House, a late 17th-century house built on and incorporating parts of the former St Helen's Hospital, founded 1137. Although less dimensionally accurate, Speed's map of 1610 (fig. 2) shows the hospital buildings.

A brief history of the chapel/hospital follows (based largely on Steer 2002, 10-18, with additions).

- A note, in a 13th-century hand in the last folio of the cartulary of Darley Abbey in the Cottonian collection, states that a chapel dedicated to St. Helen stood *on the patrimony of Tovi*, a burgess, and that, in 1137, a community of Augustinian canons was settled there thanks to the generosity of Tovi, other burgesses and others connected with the borough (Darlington 1945, ii and 638). Roffe believed that the churches of St. Helen's and St. James's, held by burgesses in the 12th century, may be identified as the two churches noted in Domesday Book held by the burgesses Coln and Brown in the time of King Edward (Roffe 1986, 23). If this supposition is correct, then St Helen's was already in existence by 1066.
- In c.1146 the canons moved to a newly-acquired site at Darley Abbey, and the St Helens site was converted to a hospital, possibly as early as 1160, though remaining part of the abbey.
- In 1190 the site was enlarged through the acquisition of a toft and a garden on the north side. The grant included portions of meadow near St Helens Well and Alkmunds Well.
- In 1223x1231 John Brampton gave 'all the lands in Brampton he had bought from Roger of Ireland of the fee of Hugh son of Ingeram of Brampton.
- In 1276 the Master of the hospital was accused of cutting a ditch 100ft long and 2ft wide too near the *king's highway*; Steer (2002, 11) says this was possibly a precinct ditch, identified as Darley Grove).
- In 1291 the master held houses in Derby and 120 acres of arable and 3.5 acres of meadow.
- In 1521 the hospital was in ruins and it was dissolved in 1538 when it passed to the crown.
- In 1585 Sir Godfrey Foljambe possessed a house called St Helens. By 18th century part of the buildings had been converted into Old St Helens House (so called to distinguish it from St Helens House, the palladian mansion of 176X on the east side of King Street).
- In 1712 the site contained dwelling houses, orchards and an alley called St. Helen's Lane; other

18<sup>th</sup> century records state that the orchards comprised 6a 2r 2p.

- Before 1707 ownership of the site had been split into a northern section (Old St Helen's House) and southern section (*Goodwin's Orchard*). In 1745 a third house with pump and 'necessary house' was under separate ownership.
- Samuel Burton inherited Goodwin's orchard from Samuel Goodwin in 1717, and bought Old St Helen's House from Samuel Degge before 1721. He moved the alley further north, probably before 1729, and at some point he removed the boundary fence between the two sections.
- In 1798 Daniel Parker Coke inherited Goodwin's Orchard: over 3a of orchard, a house a stable converted into a house, and a conservatory. Joseph Sykes inherited Old St Helen's House with its outbuildings and stables, the gardens and 2a 2r 2p of the orchards. The boundary removed by Samuel Burton was permanently re-established. A sketch of 1792 showing the King Street elevation of Old St Helen's house survives. The appearance of the building suggests a late 17<sup>th</sup>-century construction (Hislop 2003, 4), but a pointed arch depicted in the south range is out of keeping with the rest of the building, and suggests that part of the hospital buildings may have been incorporated within the post-medieval house. By 1800 some substantial demolitions had taken place at the house.
- In 1802 the capital messuage (Old St. Helen's House) was sold to Messrs Brown (spar manufacturers) when it consisted of the house, several cottages, stable and garden, and the orchard adjoining the cottages, 2a 2r 2p in extent.
- In the same year (1802) the Browns were erecting some very spacious workshops and a 6hp steam engine (Britton & Brayley 1802, 374). Perhaps in those works, graves were found at Old St Helen's House:  
*In lowering the ground to render the access to the new manufactory more convenient, during the course of the past September the workmen discovered a great quantity of skulls, and human bones, as well as several skeletons. Two of the latter were found in coffins, the sides of which were formed of thin flag stones, placed edgewise in the earth, the natural soil serving for the bottoms. The covers were also composed with flags placed close together but not jointed. Most of the other bones were lying in confusion, without presenting any marks of a particular mode of interment, and scarcely deeper in the earth than eighteen inches or two feet. These remains render the opinion probable that this was the cemetery of the monastery, particularly as human bones have been found through the space of thirty or forty yards. In the skull of an adult, lately met with on this spot, and now in our possession, the teeth of both jaws are complete, and perfectly sound; though, judging from circumstances, it must have been interred several centuries ago; ."* (*Beauties of England and Wales* Vol III (1802) 375.)
- Development of the whole area was under way by 1806 (Fig 5). Old St Helens House was used as a spar manufactory, although it remained largely unaltered until 1817x1819. St Helens street was laid out and there was some infilling with buildings, including a methodist chapel. In Goodwin's

Orchard, Chapel Street and Goodwin Street and Orchard Steet (the latter two not named on the map) were laid out.

- By 1819 infilling with housing (including the development site) and factories was well under way, a process which continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 6).
- The most striking later developments in the area have been the pre-1899 railway and the Inner Ring Road (not shown).

## 4 The development site: archaeological potential

### Anglo-Saxon

Nothing can be said with certainty about the pre-12<sup>th</sup> century history of the site. The possibility has been raised that it stood on or close to the line of the town ditch, dated pre-1275, and possibly to be identified as the Anglo-Saxon burghal defences. Defensive structures, such as a rampart or large ditch might thus be encountered. Other possibilities include intramural structures such as domestic buildings, elements of a pre-conquest phase to St Helen's, or even extramural development. An urban church would be likely to lie within the defences, and the later choice of the site for a hospital does not preclude this. The burials found in 1802 at Old St Helen's House are as likely to have been pre-Conquest as later.

### Medieval

Old St Helen's House clearly stood on, or very close to, the former hospital buildings, and the pointed arch in the 1792 sketch suggests that it may have included part of the original fabric. The development site might thus contain any remains that might be expected in close proximity to the hospital buildings: chapel, burials, residential buildings, or a garden.

### Post-medieval

Due to dimensional inaccuracies, location of the development site on Speed's map (Fig. 3) is difficult. However, Moneypenny's map of 1791 (Fig. 4) is sufficiently accurate to show that it comprised what appears to have been a garden south of Old St Helen's House and part of the orchard to the west. Although the division of the whole former hospital site into Old St Helen's House and Goodwin's Orchard cannot be accurately identified or dated, the documentary evidence above suggests that the garden at least had always been part of the former.

The development site thus lies on former post-medieval gardens and orchards immediately south

of Old St Helens House.

The site was developed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: Orchard Street is identifiable as a track at least by 1806 (Fig. 5, though Brayley's map is not dimensionally accurate) and named by 1817. Comparison of Money Penny and Brayley (Figs. 4 and 5) show that the garden perimeter was still preserved south of St Helens Street in 1806. The rest of the development site was developed for housing between 1817 and 1819. Small terraced houses lay to the west and, to the east, more spacious buildings with individual yards. One of these was a dairy in 1925, when a plan was submitted prior to roofing-over a yard (Fig. 7). These buildings stood until demolished in connection with the construction of the Inner Ring Road (St. Alkmund's Way) in the 1970s, when part of the King Street frontage was taken back (Fig. 1).

## 5 The impact of the proposed development on potential archaeological remains

The long use of the site as a garden followed by a single phase of building may well have resulted in better preservation of any earlier archaeological remains present on the site than if it had been built over many times. The road (Orchard Street) and the 19th-century buildings will have no doubt caused some damage, but the early mapping suggests that the buildings were not substantial, and there is every likelihood that any archaeological remains originally present will have substantially survived the 19th construction and 20th-century demolitions.

Foundations and services connected with the new buildings may cause significant damage or even destroy such remains. Areas of car-parking may be expected also to have a lesser impact, though this could still be significant.

## 6 Proposals for further work

The implementation of a scheme of archaeological field evaluation is recommended to assess the nature, extent depth and thickness of archaeological remains over the development site. This scheme should be devised in consultation with the LPA's archaeological officer, and might be carried out in conjunction with geotechnical investigations to save costs and minimise ground disturbance.

This will permit a detailed assessment of the impact of construction on any archaeological remains present. If necessary, design modifications can then be considered to lessen

the impact. Where damage is unavoidable, full or partial excavation may be required to place the remains on record, prior to and/or during construction of the new scheme.

## 7 Published and unpublished works consulted

### Text

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- Steer, J., 2002. *From Religious Oratory to Spar manufactory. The Development of the Site of St. Helenes on King Street, Derby*. Unpublished report by Derbyshire Archaeological Society.

### Maps

- Speed, 1610. Map of Derby.
- Money Penny, 1791. Map of Derby.
- Brayley 1806. Map of Derby (illustrated in Steer 2002).
- Board of Health 1852. Map of Derby.



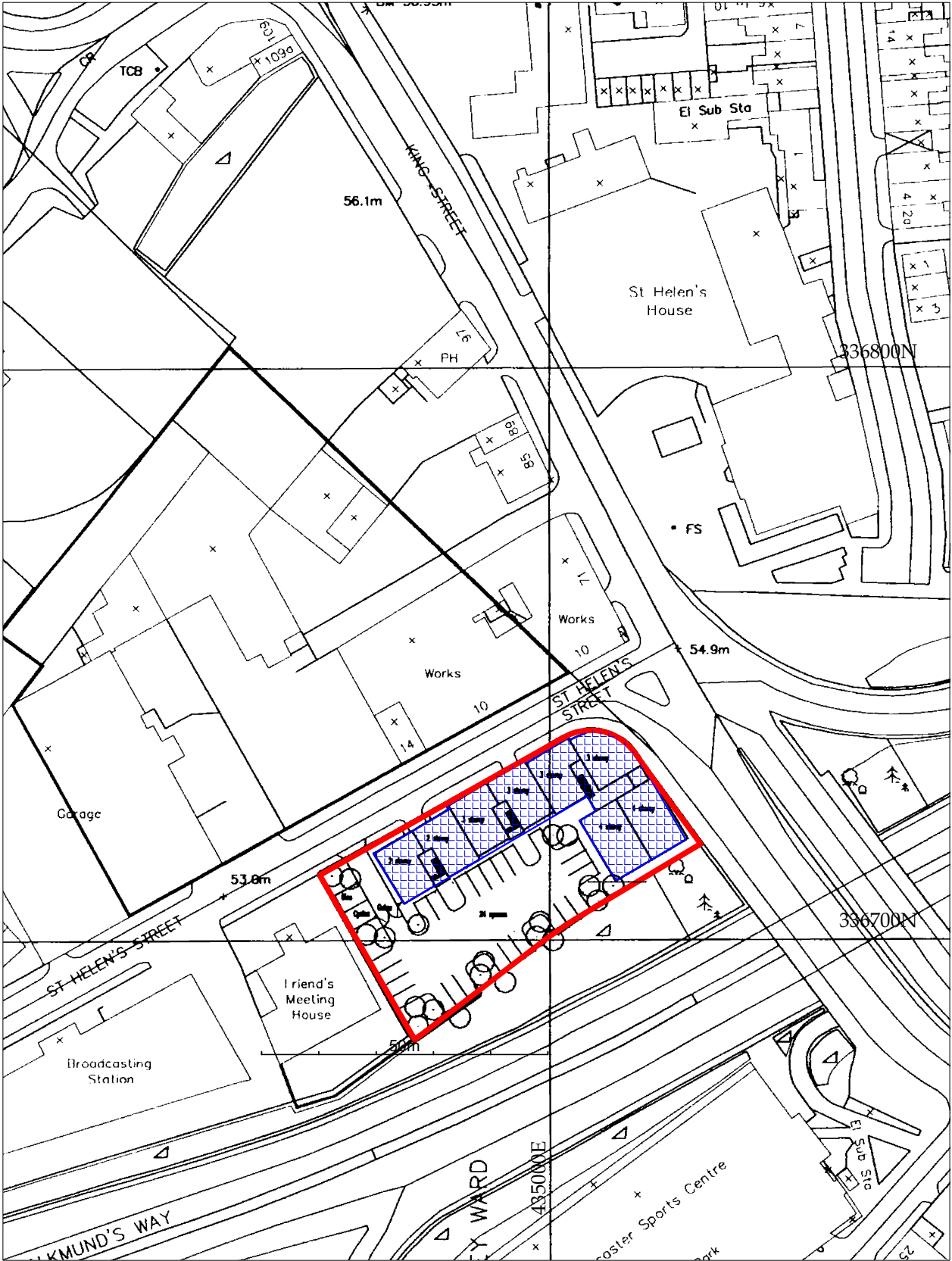


Fig. 1: site location showing site boundary (outline) and main new build (hatched)

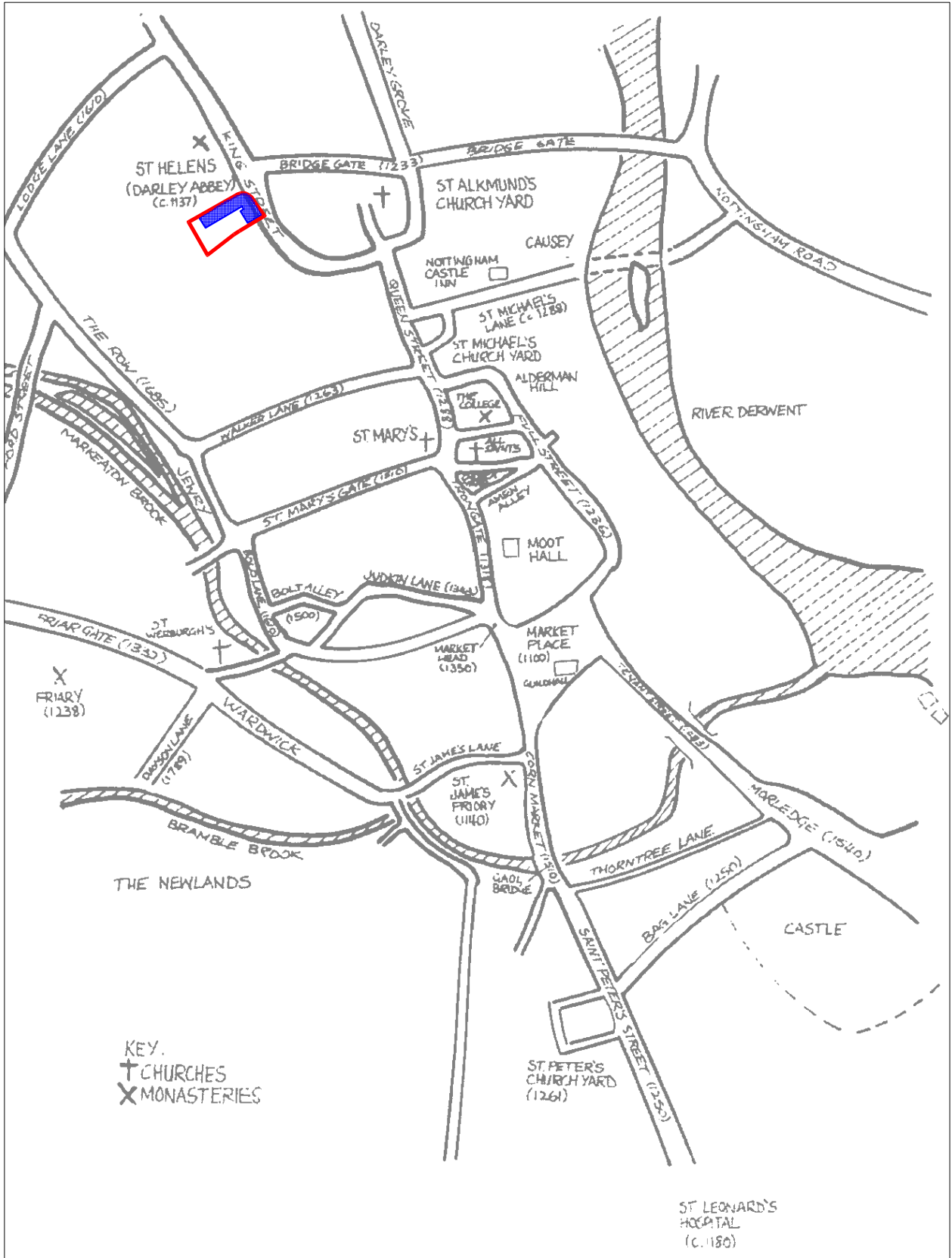


Fig. 2: Craven's reconstruction of the medieval borough, showing development site (outline) and new build (hatched)

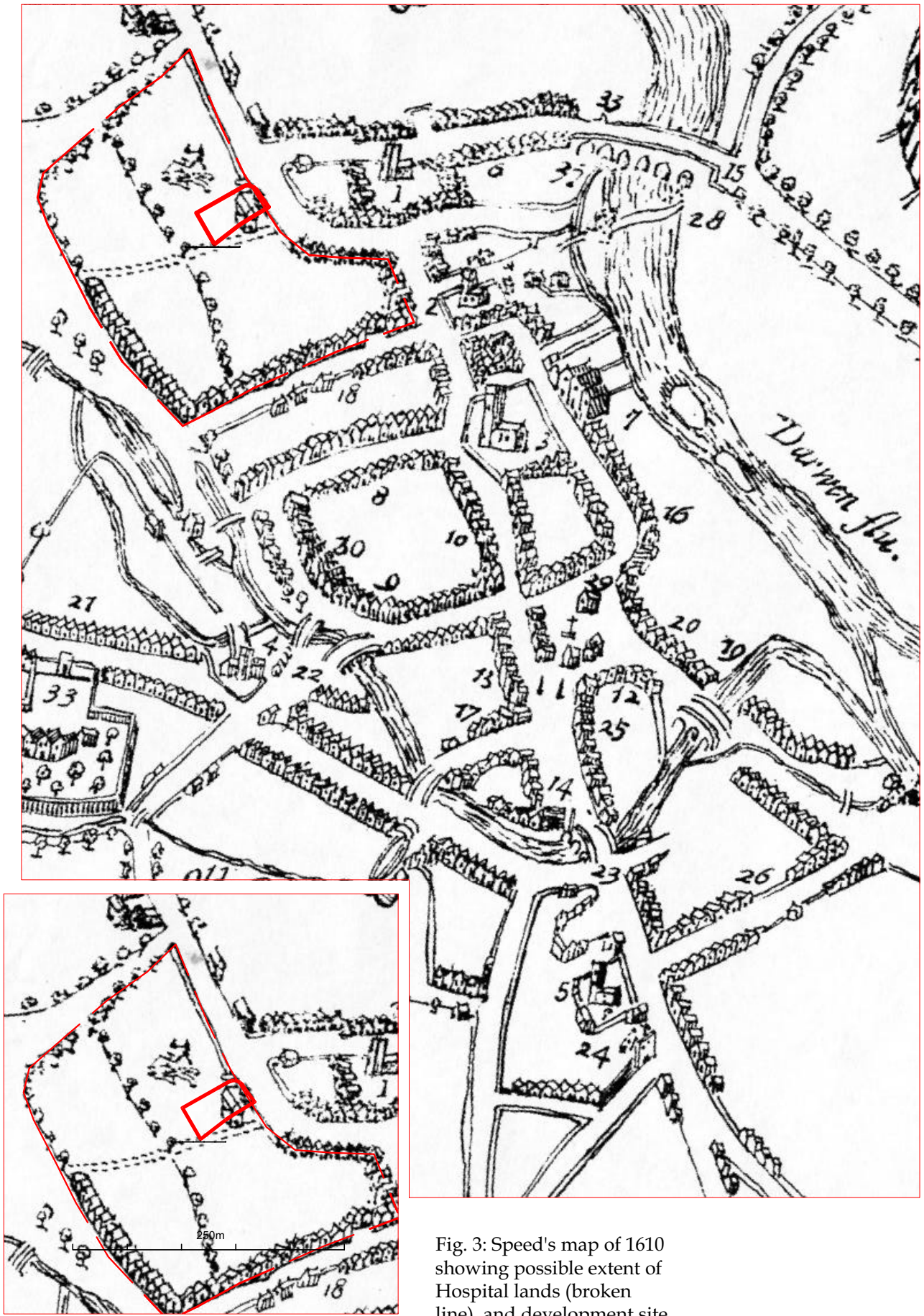


Fig. 3: Speed's map of 1610 showing possible extent of Hospital lands (broken line), and development site (outline)



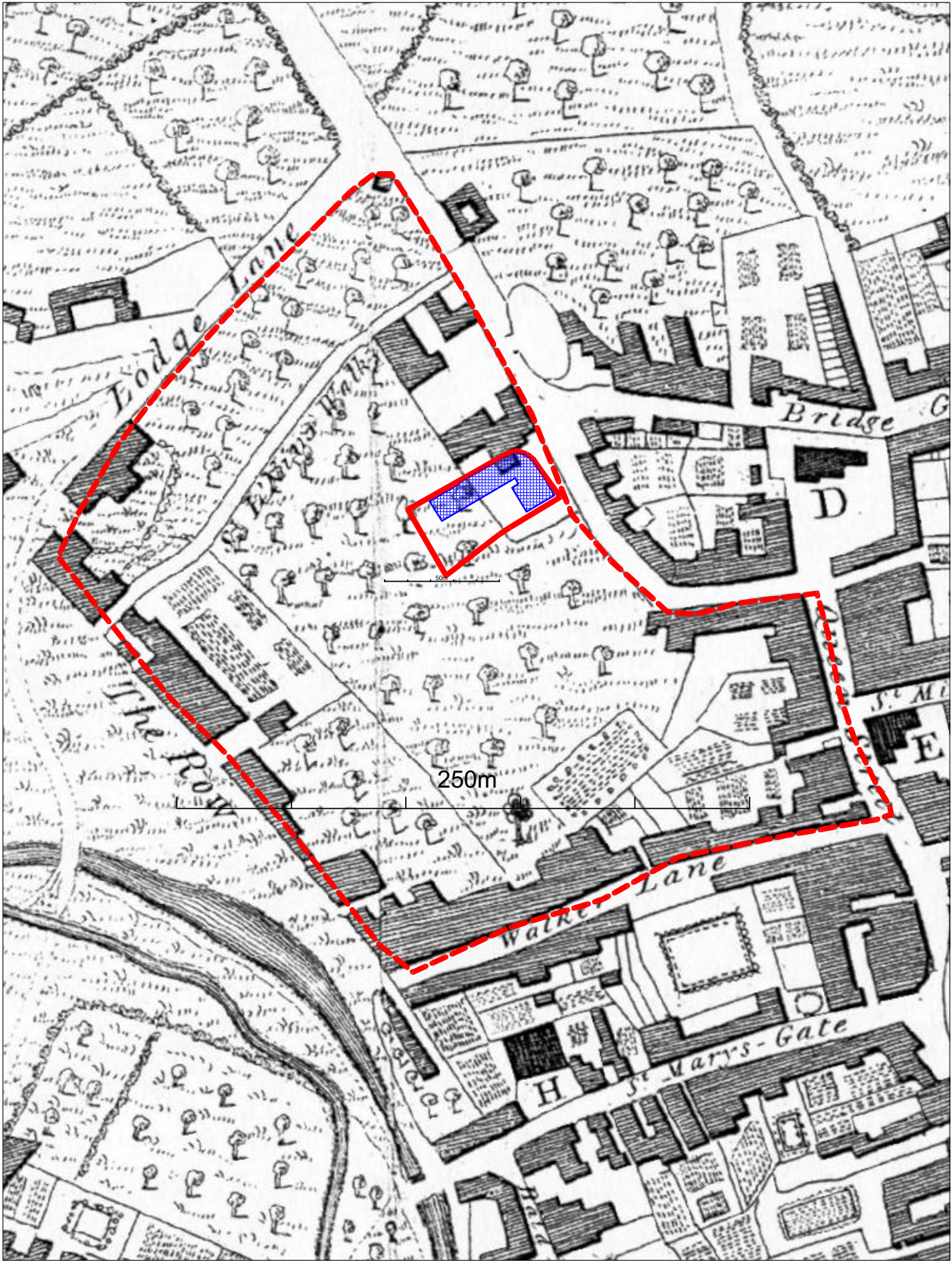


Fig. 4: Moneyppenny's map of 1791 showing possible extent of Hospital lands (broken line), development site (outline) and new build (hatched)



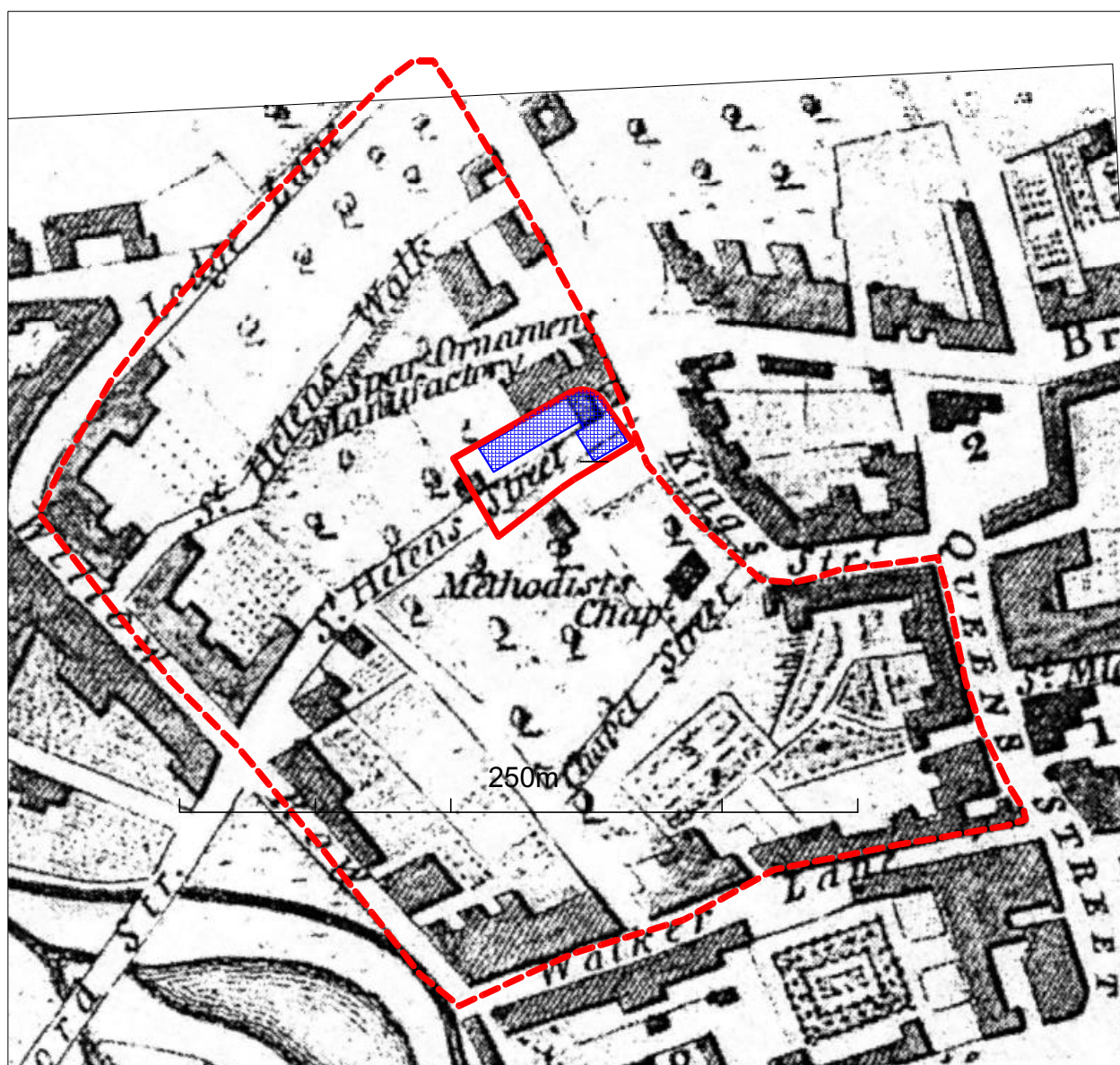


Fig. 5: Brayley's (dimensionally inaccurate) map of 1806 showing possible extent of Hospital lands (broken line), development site (outline) and new build (hatched); Old St. Helen's House is now clearly labelled the 'Spar Ornament Factory'



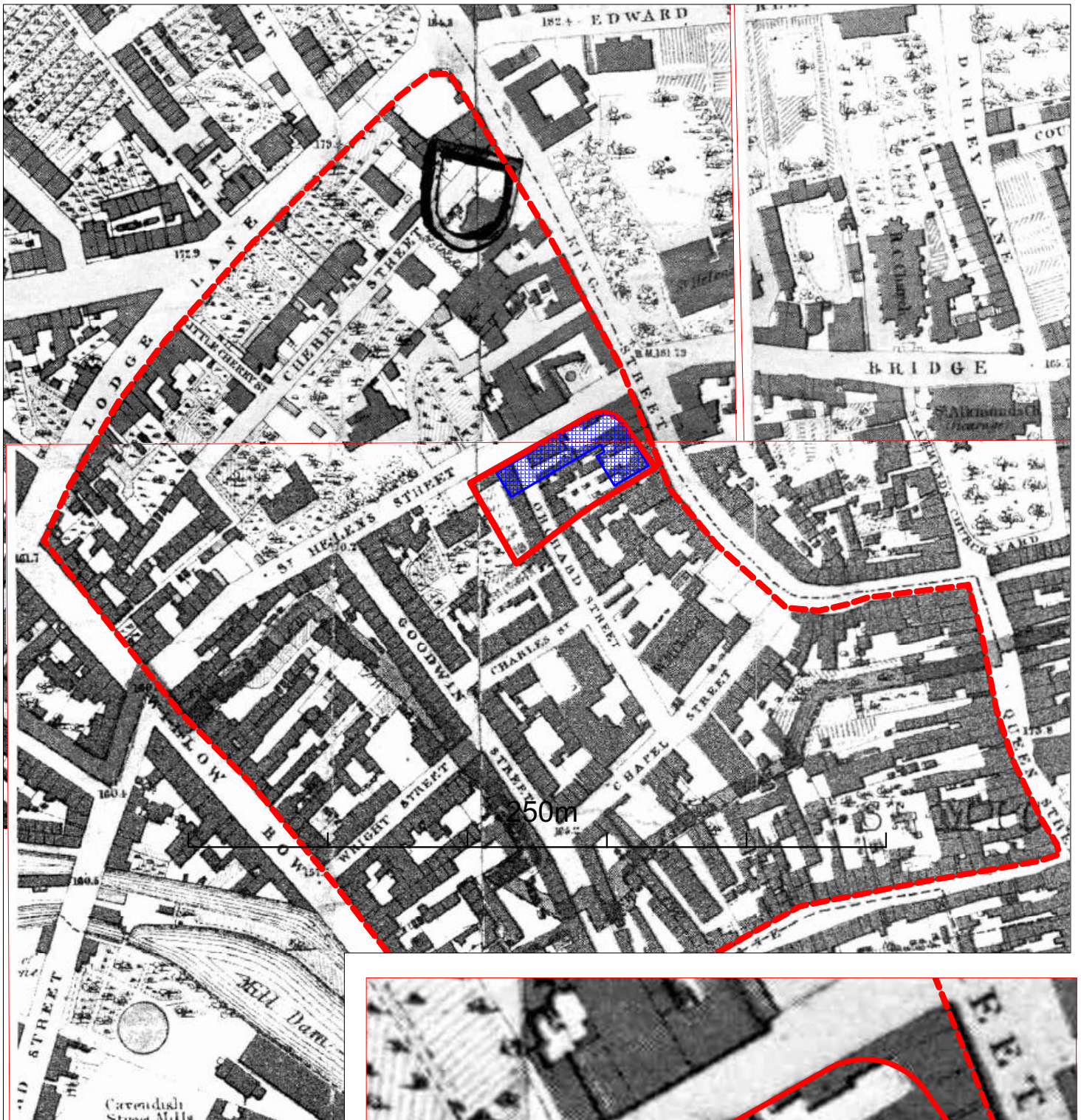


Fig. 6: Board of Health Map of 1852 showing possible extent of Hospital lands (broken line), development site (outline) and new build (hatched)

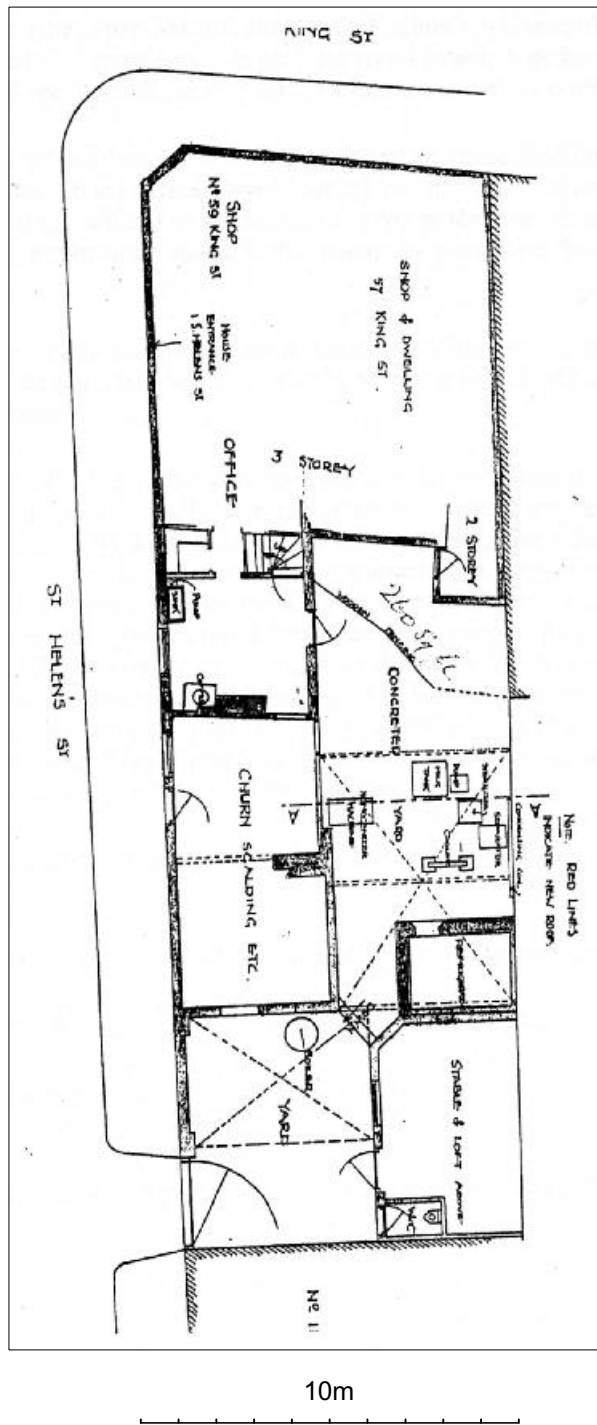


Fig. 7: Plan of Dairy within the development site, at the King Street / St. Helen's Street junction (scale approximate); after Steer 2002, 35)